

SARALEE AND RICHARD KUNDE: A PARTNERSHIP IN SONOMA COUNTY AGRICULTURE

An Oral History

Interviews by Carole Hicke, 2006



Rich and Saralee Kunde

Photo by Harvey Henningsen – Portrait Artist

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Introduction by Junita Bedolla.....	i
Wine Library of Sonoma County Oral History Series List.....	ii
Interview History.....	iii
Acknowledgements.....	vi
I. SARALEE MCCLELLAND KUNDE.....	1
Personal Background.....	2
Ancestors and Family.....	2
Growing Up in Sonoma County.....	4
School Days.....	5
Chores on the Dairy Farm.....	7
Favorite Foods.....	9
Holidays.....	10
Cal Poly.....	11
Agricultural Fairs.....	13
Livestock Entry Work.....	13
Working at the Cow Palace.....	14
Sonoma-Marin Fair, Petaluma.....	14
Restoring and Recycling.....	15
Sonoma County Fair.....	18
Courtship and Marriage.....	20
Getting to Know Sonoma Grapevines.....	23
Saralee's Vineyards.....	25
Expanding Property and Transitioning to Vineyards.....	25
Managing the Harvest.....	28
Marketing and The Farmery.....	30
Wineries and Varieties.....	33
Vineyard Management Techniques.....	35
Professional and Community Activities.....	43
Sonoma Ag Art.....	43
Select Sonoma.....	46
Achievements and Honors.....	49

II. RICHARD KUNDE.....	58
Personal Background.....	59
Ancestors and Early Days.....	59
Louis Kunde: Early Grape Grower and Vintner.....	59
Parents.....	61
Early Schooling.....	62
Growing a Home Garden.....	63
Vineyard Chores.....	63
More on the Kunde Family.....	64
University of California, Davis.....	65
Horticulture and Viticulture.....	65
Luther Burbank Art & Garden Center.....	66
Developing a Test for Dagger Nematode Resistance.....	66
Reinventing Richard Kunde.....	68
California North Coast Grape Growers Association.....	70
Hiring On.....	70
Responsibilities.....	71
Changing the Industry: BATF Rules.....	72
Creation of American Viticultural Areas.....	72
Changing Varietal Labeling.....	72
Defining Wine Label Terms.....	73
Benefits of Published Prices.....	74
Wildwood Consulting.....	76
Protecting the American Market for Zinfandel.....	77
Sonoma Grapevines, Inc.....	80
Founding the Company.....	80
Foliage Sales Representative.....	81
Grafting and Rootstocks.....	82
Black Goo.....	87
Saralee's Vineyards.....	90
More on Sonoma Grapevines.....	90
Technology and Change.....	90
Selling Sonoma Grapevines.....	92
Professional Activities and Honors.....	94
Horticulture.....	94
Founding Sonoma County Grape Growers.....	94
Other Activities and Awards.....	95

Index.....	97
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APPENDICES

- Saralee Kunde: *curriculum vitae*
- Richard Kunde: *curriculum vitae*
- 2006 Vintage Buyers
- Agstravaganza Honoring Rich and Saralee Kunde

INTRODUCTION

When one hears the name Kunde, the thing that comes to mind is daffodils. This excerpt from a web page tells it best:

“The daffodils burst on the scene and offer the hope of spring even if the calendar says otherwise. Daffodils just scream spring, which is my favorite time of the year in the Russian River Valley,” says grape grower Saralee McClelland Kunde, the valley’s daffodil diva and one of its chief cheerleaders in the planting of more than **25 tons** of daffodil bulbs in the valley.

Richard and Saralee Kunde have been well known in the agricultural community for decades. In the early years, Richard owned and ran Sonoma Grapevines, an immensely successful grapevine nursery. Saralee was involved in the dairy business with her family. She was also involved with many nonprofit organizations. Her priceless, characteristic whirlwind energy and enthusiasm were pivotal to these organizations. She was on the Santa Rosa Fair Board for many years, always giving determinedly. Both have been involved, dedicated and committed to their agricultural community.

Together they developed vineyards that, from the beginning, rivaled any other in quality. Every grape variety they planted was highly sought after. Many brands now use their name on the label. In addition to being hands-on parents in the lives of their two children, be it with 4-H or the El Molino High School, they continue to be leaders in the Farm Bureau, Russian River Valley Winegrowers, Sonoma County Grape Growers and countless other organizations. They persistently contribute to the community, setting up scholarships at UC Davis and being so generous to their Sonoma County community. Their hospitality and kindness is admirable; they teach by example not solely words. Richard and Saralee Kunde form a cornerstone of Sonoma County agriculture. It is an honor to publish this story of theirs, one of resilience, dedication and example.

Junita Bedolla
The Wine Library Associates of Sonoma County
Fall 2006

THE WINE LIBRARY ASSOCIATES OF SONOMA COUNTY

ORAL HISTORY SERIES

1. DAVIS BYNUM: A CREATIVE WINE PIONEER. An oral history. 2001
2. GEORGE GREEOTT: INNOVATION AND HARD WORK IN WINEGROWING AND RANCHING. An oral history. 2003
3. MILDRED HOWIE: A PUBLIC RELATIONS PIONEER IN THE SONOMA COUNTY WINE INDUSTRY. An oral history. 2003
4. SARALEE AND RICHARD KUNDE: A PARTNERSHIP IN SONOMA COUNTY AGRICULTURE. An Oral history. 2006

INTERVIEW HISTORY

Saralee and Rich Kunde are classic icons for the Sonoma County agricultural industry. Growing up in the county, they acquired for the county's produce and products a hearty respect that they have translated into significant contributions to its residents. In agreeing to do this oral history, they have recorded their personal and professional motivations and interests that led to their remarkable accomplishments.

Saralee comes from a dairy farming family, and she demonstrated her early interest in agriculture by demanding that the high school admit girls — herself and others — to the agricultural science class. She attended Cal Poly to study dairy science, despite her father's insistence that it was not a suitable career for a woman.

She did not, in fact, become a dairy farmer. Instead, she developed her burgeoning interest in agriculture into a 21-year career working for and managing county and state fairs, including a stint at San Francisco's Cow Palace handling national exhibitions.

In 1982, she married Rich Kunde and they began acquiring and planting vineyards. By 1988 Saralee's Vineyards became a full-time job and she gave up the fairs — except for attending them with their children.

The list of her achievements, professional and community memberships, and volunteer service is too long to be covered in the oral history, although she discussed a few of the most important.

Rich Kunde also grew up on a family ranch; it was in Glen Ellen and was called Wildwood Vineyards. His grandfather, Louis Kunde, had planted grapes in 1885 and his winery, called Wildwood Vineyards, lasted until World War II. Besides the experience of working in his father's vineyards, Rich demonstrated a budding interest in horticulture by establishing a home garden for his mother. Horticulture and gardening are still what he does.

B.A. and Master's degrees from the University of California, Davis, prepared him for his career in vine grafting and grape growing. He began consulting for the California North Coast Grape Growers Association in 1966, then became director of grower relations in 1970. In this capacity, he wrote a hugely significant letter to the Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco and Firearms that resulted in major changes in the industry. The BATF agreed to his proposal to formalize rules and regulations for the creation of American Viticultural Appellations. The California North Coast became the country's first AVA.

But the letter also asked for — and got — more. In response to it, the BATF agreed to increase the percentage of grapes to be included in a labeled varietal wine from 51 percent to 75 percent, and also ruled that terms on the label such as "mountains" should be carefully defined.

Meanwhile, Rich had begun investing in Sonoma Grapevines, a grafting business, but by 1976 it was about to go under. Rich gave up his job with the North Coast Grape Growers and went to work to salvage Sonoma Grapevines. He first began growing house plants — Wandering Jew and such — and drove the county selling the foliage. This not only increased cash flow but provided full-time employment for his workers, who were then available in spring for the grafting.

As the business grew, he bought out the other investors and was sole owner by 1982. In the 1990s, his nursery business exploded and he bought additional property, some of it in Madera and Fresno counties. In 1997, Sonoma Grapevines grafted over 11 million vines.

In this history, Rich explains some of the secrets of his success. He had available dozens of varieties, many more than most nurseries, and he planted large numbers of different clones, which he obtained from UC Davis. Furthermore, he grafted huge numbers of vines, even in the years when he had very few orders, and he always managed to sell them. His operation was service- and client-oriented, to the extent that customers could return any vine at any time. As he notes ironically, their present vineyard is planted mostly with such rejects — and it is doing very well indeed.

Sonoma Grapevines was sold at the turn of the century, but Saralee's Vineyards are becoming famous and the grapes much coveted.

Rich's recollections were tape-recorded on November 13, 2006, and Saralee's on November 14, 2006. They had just finished with the grape harvest, a huge amount of work, and were kind enough to schedule the interviews on the first days they had free. They had looked over the outline of topics I sent them, and they welcomed me in their office at 3351 Slusser Road, which is located southwest of Windsor in Sonoma County. The office overlooks part of their vineyard and has a view of the barn now restored as their residence.

As with the interviews Rich and Saralee kindly agreed to the Wine Library Associates' request for an early completion, and they reviewed, edited and returned the draft transcripts in record time.

An oral history is, by definition, an informal discussion, and is structured to maintain the flavor of the narrator's personality. Therefore we have attempted to retain a sense of spontaneous conversation, as well as ensuring that the speaker's thoughts come through clearly. Words in brackets have been inserted editorially for clarity.

Research for this project was conducted in the Sonoma County Library in Healdsburg with the kind assistance of librarian Bo Simons.

The recording of oral histories is a way of saving yesterday today for tomorrow. In this history, there is much to be saved.

Carole Hicke
December, 2006

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

Oral history is a method of collecting historical information. In today's world of television and cellular telephones, it is a way of documenting events and insights that otherwise might not be recorded. Individual recollections can offer hitherto unknown information, reveal insights, and round out descriptions of public figures.

More than merely reciting the facts, oral histories add a new dimension to our knowledge. They add the human perspective to the historical record, and they capture the personality of the narrator.

The purpose of this oral history series is to record and preserve information on Sonoma County grapegrowing and winemaking. The series is sponsored by the Wine Library Associates of Sonoma County, and the following people have contributed to this particular document:

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I. SARALEE MCCLELLAND KUNDE

PERSONAL BACKGROUND

ANCESTORS AND FAMILY

[Interview November 14, 2006]

HICKE: Let's start this morning, Saralee, with when and where you were born please.

S. KUNDE: I was born January 4th, 1948 in San Rafael, California.

HICKE: Did you grow up there?

S. KUNDE: No, my parents had a dairy in Novato, and there was no hospital in Novato, and so that's why I was born in San Rafael. I came home to our family dairy in Novato. My parents had gone there in 1939 and then I was born in 1948.

HICKE: Can we go back? Can you tell me about your grandparents?

S. KUNDE: Well, my grandparents on my mother's side were both born and raised in Ireland, Northern Ireland, and then emigrated to the United States.

HICKE: What were their names?

S. KUNDE: Rebecca Jane Henning Wilson and Walter Ralston Wilson. They both came from different towns in Ireland, and then married here in San Francisco.

HICKE: When did they come to the United States?

S. KUNDE: They came in the early 1900s, very early. My mother was born in San Francisco, although she was 100 percent Irish. My father was born in Ireland and emigrated to this country when he was 19.

HICKE: What was his name?

S. KUNDE: Robert McClelland, and my mother is Lillian Elizabeth McClelland. My dad's parents, I never met. I never met my grandparents on my father's side. They had both passed away.

My father came in 1929, and my parents were married in '37. And in '38, I believe, my mother won a car, and they drove that car from California to New York, and they sailed on the *Queen Mary* to Ireland with my grandparents on my mother's side. So my mother got to meet my grandparents, and then they came back, and that's when they went into the dairy business. My father never went back to Ireland until 1984.

So that was it, 100 percent Irish. There's not too many of those around. My husband thinks I have that Irish temper to prove it.

HICKE: How did your father decide to go into the dairy business?

S. KUNDE: My father's father, my grandfather, in Ireland was a stone mason, and my father could build anything. He remodeled our house in Novato and was always laying concrete. I learned to pour cement with him and do all sorts of things like that. I loved the outdoors and anything connected with it.

My mother's family had a small dairy, and everyone milked their own cows at that time. This dairy was for sale in Novato, and my mother taught my father how to milk. He didn't know how to milk a cow, so they went with one Brown Swiss cow to Novato in 1939. Then they started from there.

HICKE: They were pretty brave to start up a business in the '30s.

S. KUNDE: Yes. And they had a bottle milk delivery business as well.

[Tape interruption]

S. KUNDE: And they delivered door-to-door. They did that through Hamilton Field in Novato, all over down there. They went from there sort of out of the milk delivery business some time before I was born.

Then they just had a dairy. We had the dairy in Novato and then moved from Novato; my parents bought a dairy, 337 acres in Two Rock Valley, west of Petaluma, so we moved out there. We bought in 1964 and moved out there in 1965. I was a junior in high school when we moved to Petaluma. And my brother is still on that dairy today with his family.

HICKE: Do you have other siblings?

S. KUNDE: I have my brother George, who is the youngest. He is five years younger than I am. Then my sister Rebecca is seven years older than I am.

My brother Robert was killed in an auto accident when he was 19. He was nine years older than I was. It was a tragic accident coming home. We never really did figure out what happened when he was forced off the road coming from the Mendocino County Fair in Booneville on that winding, curvy road. He was going back to Booneville at five o'clock in the morning. So there is just the three of us now.

My sister and her husband actually were in the dairy business. They sold out. My sister is not really well. She has rheumatoid arthritis very bad, and is having a hard time doing anything, getting around. So her husband is retired. They down-sized and bought a modular home, and they put it on our vineyard at Coffey Lane. So they are there and only five minutes away from us, and they can care-take there which works out very well. Alan pretty much takes care of Rebecca. He works part time for Hertz. He's a "hiker" moving cars back and forth because he enjoys people and that kind of thing. So he does very well with that.

GROWING UP IN SONOMA COUNTY

HICKE: OK, back to your youthful days.

S. KUNDE: Youthful days long ago. [laughter]

HICKE: What grade school did you go to?

S. KUNDE: To the Olive Avenue School in Novato, which was just down the road from us. We lived at 495 Olive Avenue.

HICKE: Do you remember anything about it particularly?

S. KUNDE: I walked every day. It was just down Olive Avenue. Then we lived in the middle of the country, and then Novato grew up around them, and Olive Avenue School was probably not a half a mile from our dairy. Then my parents decided to move when one Halloween all of our cows — we used to milk about 120 cows, or so in Novato, and all of the milk cows were in downtown Novato. Somebody opened the gate — they thought it was a wonderful prank on Halloween. There were sidewalks right up to the dairy. The city limit sign was right across the street from our dairy. So that Halloween my dad said, "That's it. We have to move." The city had engulfed us so.

HICKE: Did you get your cows back?

S. KUNDE: Oh yes. I can remember going out on Halloween night and driving cows home from town. So it was very interesting. My parents saw so much growth from 1939 until 1965 there. In '39 there was hardly anybody.

SCHOOL DAYS

S. KUNDE: So Olive Avenue School was just down the road. Then I went to Hill Junior High, because that was the only junior high in Novato, then to Novato High School until my senior year. I finished my junior year at Novato and then we moved and I graduated from Petaluma High School.

HICKE: Does anything about your school days stand out?

S. KUNDE: I loved it when I came to Petaluma High School because Novato had no ag program or anything. There were a few of us girls who were the first girls in the ag science class at Petaluma High School. We had to go to the school board to get in.

HICKE: What year are we in?

S. KUNDE: That was 1965, '66. In those days there were no girls in FFA, Future Farmers of America. It was all boys. Girls could not join FFA. It was strictly boys.

At Petaluma High School Mr. DeJong was our ag teacher. We wanted to take ag science, and he didn't want any girls in his ag science classes. There were some girls who just wanted to take it because it was a whole class of boys. But I was interested because I grew up on a dairy and I showed cows and I was in 4-H. That was my background, and I wanted to learn more. So we petitioned the school board, went to school board meetings so that he had to take girls into the ag science class.

HICKE: How did he treat you after you got in?

S. KUNDE: Actually, it was all right. He wouldn't let us join FFA for a long time. So I grew up where there were no girls in FFA. Some girls who took ag science — you know it was kind of a joke for them because they just wanted to meet boys or they weren't interested. So that was it.

So Mr. DeJong was actually pretty good to us. He wasn't happy at first, but we won.

HICKE: What did you study?

S. KUNDE: It was elements of dairying and general ag classes.

HICKE: You could have taught that! [chuckles]

S. KUNDE: That's what my father said when I went off to college. After the first year he was sure that if I wanted to major in dairy science, which is what I majored in at Cal Poly [California Polytechnic State University, San Luis Obispo, California], that if I wanted to do that I had to pay for it myself. He didn't think that there was any place for a girl at that time to go off to Cal Poly and major in dairy science and show cows and be on the judging team and do that kind of thing. If you wanted to be a teacher or you wanted to be a nurse or be something that he thought was what I should do, then he was happy to help pay for it.

I went to college — I mean I still don't know what I want to do, and I sure didn't know then. [laughter]

HICKE: Let's back up to high school for a moment. You were in ag science classes.

S. KUNDE: Yes. We studied dairying, beef and sheep and swine, all of the different livestock species, and judging, and parts of all of those different animals.

HICKE: Was it mostly animals?

S. KUNDE: We did some horticulture, some plant science, but not a whole lot. But I wasn't very interested in that thing either. So it probably didn't stand out as much. We learned the different counties in California and what their major commodities were and what counties were leading in dairying, the different production and the different county ag crop reports.

That was a long time ago and it has changed somewhat, but not a whole lot, because my son is in ag science now, and he's learning pretty much the same kind of thing.

HICKE: In high school?

S. KUNDE: Yes. So the curriculum hasn't changed a whole lot, although the dynamics of it has changed dramatically, and the way things are done. But it's still pretty much the same.

CHORES ON THE DAIRY FARM

HICKE: What did you have to do around the dairy in those days?

S. KUNDE: I fed calves and I did a lot of the bookwork. My mother always did the accounting books. We had registered Holsteins, so I did all the registration papers, registering all the calves and keeping track of breeding records.

HICKE: We're talking about high school now?

S. KUNDE: Yes. Our big thing was to be in 4-H and showing at the fairs during vacation. I don't ever remember our family going on a family vacation other than going to the fairs. We didn't go anywhere.

HICKE: That was good practice for your later years.

S. KUNDE: Exactly. I mean the cows had to be milked twice a day, 365 days a year, and all the holidays were spent at our house. My father's family came and my mother's family came, because it was always centered on when dad had to milk. We had to be ready to milk in the afternoon. My father's relatives pretty much all lived in the city, in San Francisco, or down on the Peninsula, so they always came to our house, and it was just always that way I guess.

I always did chores. We always had our own animals and did our own thing.

HICKE: Did your dad grow the feed?

S. KUNDE: No, we didn't grow any feed at all, no crops. When we lived in Novato we only had 67 acres. That was the ranch there, and when we moved to Two Rock we had 337 acres. Then we had pasture for heifers.

I did a lot of the driving of the cattle truck, hauling heifers to pasture. We used to pasture heifers over in Lodi, and I would haul heifers over there, back and forth. I drove the cattle truck a lot. There was the auction yard — there were two auctions in Petaluma, and when bull calves were born we took them to the auction yard, and I would either drive the pickup truck or the cattle truck to school at least one or two days a week and haul heifers or calves to the auction yard on the way.

Then once we got in Two Rock we built a whole new dairy. It was a chicken ranch when we got it; it wasn't a working dairy. So my folks went there every day; every morning after my dad milked in the morning they went to Two Rock. My brother and I had to be home right after school because we milked at night. So we milked every night.

HICKE: Did you have milking machines?

S. KUNDE: Oh definitely. We had milking machines always from whenever I can remember. In Novato we had a backout barn, then in Two Rock we had a parlor barn. We just walked in the parlor barn and the cows were raised and it was much easier milking there.

We did whatever it took to make everything work. And everybody worked together. That was just the way it was. And we always had a hired man who would do chores or milk some or do whatever. My dad

got hurt, and I can remember my mother — we had this one milker whom my mother and I fired but, “You’re not going to fire me.” “My mother is going to give you your last paycheck and you better get out of here, you’re done.”

HICKE: He wasn’t doing the job because your dad wasn’t there?

S. KUNDE: Yes. So that was it. Then my brother and I milked. My mother was not afraid of work either, and she could keep up with anybody, and dad too. So we learned a good work ethic when we were young.

FAVORITE FOODS

HICKE: To switch subjects here a little bit. Did you have any favorite foods, or meals, that you remember when you were growing up?

S. KUNDE: Everything was pretty much meat and potatoes, and boiled. That’s the big joke with Richard, because the Irish always had stew of some sort, or you had boiled potatoes with almost every meal. And [laughter] Richard loves spices and garlic, and my father — my father’s stomach was never very good. I don’t know, he always got heartburn or indigestion, and so my mother never used many spices of any kind. So my whole family still laughs at Richard because he loves pepper, and he has spice shelves. Richard does all the cooking at our house now since we’ve been married, so he is always trying something new, and we never tried anything new.

My grandmother would come, my mother’s mother, Nana, would come, and she would always make chocolate layer cake or white layer cake almost every Sunday. They would come for Sunday supper. Nana would come with the cake, and she would always frost it at our house so we would always get to lick the bowls and the beaters. I just remember that a lot. Mom never baked; Nana always baked.

HICKE: Did you have a vegetable garden?

S. KUNDE: Yes. And fava beans. My father always grew fava beans.

HICKE: That’s Italian.

S. KUNDE: Yes. I don’t know how he ever got into them. But he always had those. And dad loved liver and onions. I still can’t handle liver and onions but

he would always love liver and onions so she would cook that and the fava beans and...

HICKE: Did you have to sit at the table until you ate all the liver?

S. KUNDE: We would sit and eat whatever was there — my mother would always say, “You will eat it before it eats you.” It was absolutely ridiculous.

HICKE: And how about all those kids in China.

S. KUNDE: They’re still starving, trust me. [laughter] All my life I was overweight, and it was always, “Clean your plate or else you don’t get any dessert.” We’ve gone the complete opposite with our kids. The garbage disposal and the chickens get a lot. Actually the garbage disposal doesn’t get hardly anything. We hardly use it, but the chickens or the dog... Why make them eat it to have dessert?

HICKE: Didn’t it take a long time to train yourself though not to clean your plate?

S. KUNDE: It was hard. When we were little and growing up she would serve you, and there was always so much. We always ate together and we usually always had somebody there too. I can remember just having to eat vegetables and having to eat the liver and onions. I actually can’t stand them but Richard loves liver and onions. [laughter]

HOLIDAYS

HICKE: Holidays. You told about your family gathering at your house holidays.

S. KUNDE: Always at our home, and now at our house; his whole family and my whole family always come. My mother passed away in 1999, and she lived with us here. She still had her own home in Two Rock, but she lived with us a lot, and she and my father both enjoyed Richard and really liked him, so he was great with them.

Our house just became the place for Christmas. My sister does Thanksgiving, but we always decorate a lot for Christmas.

I love Christmas and do a gingerbread house party every year that we have been doing for 12 or 14 years. We started doing it shortly after Richard and I were married. I think this is the 12th year that we are

going to do it in this barn/house. This last year we did 125 gingerbread houses. It's wonderful; we decorate everything in our house and everyone gets a gingerbread house to decorate themselves and then take home. We put them all together the day before. Richard is already buying candy as he sees different things for decorating the houses. He's working on Neco wafers because Neco wafers make great roofs, the chocolate Neco wafers do as roofs along with Frosted Shredded Wheat. So he works on that for a month or so to get all the candy bought.

HICKE: Who comes to the party?

S. KUNDE: Friends and kids who have grown up with our kids, and then all of our employees and their children. So it's a couple hundred people. We put a tent up behind the garage, and then we have picnic tables and put everything out there for decorating the gingerbread houses.

HICKE: That's a nice gesture.

S. KUNDE: It's a fun thing. The guests have enjoyed it forever, and when I was working at the fairgrounds I had a friend — this was the early '80s and she got us started making a gingerbread house, and it was just so much fun and we just kept on going.

HICKE: Going and growing!

S. KUNDE: Yes, that's the biggest problem, although we have some kids who started with us who are off to college. We take pictures each year and it's fun to watch them grow up.

CAL POLY

HICKE: You were determined to go to Cal Poly?

S. KUNDE: Yes, and major in dairy science. I didn't have any clear direction of what I wanted to do. I was always going to marry a dairyman, so that was it. I was going to go to Cal Poly and major in dairy science and go from there. I was the only girl from Petaluma in 1966 who was going, and I had all these guys who were good friends from high school and from showing at the fairs. There were five or six boys who were going to Cal Poly and I thought I might as well go too. So I went.

HICKE: Did you have to pay your own way?

S. KUNDE: My parents helped me, and then dad kept saying — he was very old-school, and I would come home with new ideas or new things but he wasn't too keen on any of those then. He just thought we were having way too good a time down there. [laughter] And we did have a good time.

We went to the national Holstein Show and the judging, all the same kinds of things that we did in 4-H but this was on a college level, and it was a great time. So after the first year, the second year he was like, "Get into something that you can fall back on if you need to if you haven't found a dairyman." "Well, I haven't found one yet." [laughter]

AGRICULTURAL FAIRS

LIVESTOCK ENTRY WORK

S. KUNDE: I had no idea what I really wanted to do. My girlfriend, Susie Campbell Irwin, and I started a business, and in 1966 we started working at fairs.

HICKE: Did you graduate from Cal Poly?

S. KUNDE: No, I quit. I went to Cal Poly in '66 and '67, and then Susie and I had started, because we had always shown at the fairs in high school and junior high, and then we got into doing all the livestock entry work at the fairs, all the bookwork and taking the entries and processing them, and clerking the shows, doing all that. So for about five or six years we traveled. We each bought a travel trailer and we traveled up and down the state and clerked livestock shows all over California. I was doing that in the summer when I was at Cal Poly, and then when I decided not to go back we got offered a job at the Cow Palace.

[Tape interruption]

HICKE: Before we get to the Cow Palace how did you market your services, or did they already know you?

S. KUNDE: They knew us from showing at the fairs and at that time there weren't very many — it was kind of a close-knit community. If you worked at one fair they would recommend you to another fair. So Susie and I did very well. And Mary McPherson, another friend from here, worked with us at quite a few fairs as well.

At the high point of what we were doing we worked at 16 different fairs in California. We had a great time. It was fun, too, and it was hard work. You would get done with one on a Sunday night and get their books balanced and figure out who had to get what checks and who

should get everything. And they had state auditors who would come in and check your work. So we learned a lot from that.

WORKING AT THE COW PALACE

S. KUNDE: We worked at the Sonoma County Fair. We worked at Sonoma-Marin Fair, Napa County Fair, Napa Town and Country, the Cow Palace. The Cow Palace was always in the fall, and the Cow Palace offered us a job to work about five months out of the year there.

HICKE: On fairs?

S. KUNDE: Yes, because the Cow Palace had — their Grand National used to be at the end of October, the first of November. Then their spring show was their Junior Grand National. That was always Easter vacation. So we would work at the Cow Palace for the Grand National. Then I had another friend whose parents owned Eppler's Bakery in San Francisco, so Susie and I would work at Eppler's Bakery over Christmas, the holidays, for them and then work on Sundays. That was when it was new and still open on Sunday from 12:00 to 4:00. No one wanted to work on Sunday. So I would go downtown to Stockton and O'Farrell [streets] and I would open the store on Sunday downtown.

We did that after Cow Palace all through December, and then we would go back to the Cow Palace in January to get ready for the junior show. So that worked out very well. We did that for a number of years.

SONOMA-MARIN FAIR, PETALUMA

S. KUNDE: Then in 1972 — we did that from '66 to '72, and in '72 there was a position open at Petaluma Fair for the manager's job, and Bev Wilson who was an accounting technician there got the job so she became the manager, Bev Wilson became the manager, and I became her accounting technician or secretary.

HICKE: Is this the Sonoma-Marin Fair?

S. KUNDE: Yes.

HICKE: That was from 1972 to 1979?

S. KUNDE: Yes. I went to work there and worked there until I went to the Sonoma County Fair in 1979.

HICKE: Who was Bev Wilson?

S. KUNDE: She was the manager. At that time she was my aunt for awhile. Then she divorced my uncle, and then re-married him. [laughter]

HICKE: What were your responsibilities?

S. KUNDE: Taking minutes for the board of directors, and doing books. We ran the whole fairgrounds. She was the manager and I was her assistant and we rented the facility. If you called up and wanted to have a wedding reception, I was who you talked to. I would rent the buildings, book the carnival, book all the concessionaires, all the food concessions and the commercial building; people would hawk all their wares in there, the blender man and others. Bank of Marin was always in there. So we booked all of those.

That was a permanent, year-round job. I would take my vacation, and there wasn't any overtime but you got compensating time off. And so I would take compensating time off and I would still go work at the Cow Palace, just during the Grand National Show. And I would take time off and go work at the Sonoma County Fair just during the show.

HICKE: You were a glutton for punishment. [laughter]

S. KUNDE: I always had a few extra jobs going. I also sold tickets at the hard top races at Petaluma. That was always fun. Steve Dorfman was a very good friend, and he went to auctioneering school and he started an auction business. So I did his books, and I clerked all of his auctions for 10 or 12 years.

HICKE: That was interesting.

RESTORING AND RECYCLING

S. KUNDE: It was fun. A lot of our house is furnished in early auction. [laughter] I mean there were a lot of antiques, and I was a pack rat even in high school. I would bring things home. Back there in our house is my parents' old bottlemilk case that they had bought used in 1939. It's

bigger than that case there. [gestures] It's huge. It was a refrigerated case that they kept all of their bottles in once they were filled and were capped.

When we moved from Novato my father said, "I don't want that thing here. Leave it here." I said, "No, no, I want it." I hauled it to Two Rock and put it in the barn there. My father said, "All that thing reminds me of is work." And I said, "But some day I am going to use that somewhere." So when we converted that old barn here into our house, I had it restored. It was all solid oak and it had brass hinges and so we put shelves in it for wine. So lots of antiques are in our barn/home.

HICKE: This is getting a little ahead of your story, but Rich told me that part of your vineyard is planted with rejected vines, so you are really good at re-cycling.

S. KUNDE: Oh yes. Well, even the house when we re-did it we bought a lot of recycled materials. All the banisters are from a brewery in Milwaukee. All of the siding that we used inside is from the old Scotia Mill at Scotia. All the wood in there is all re-cycled from that.

HICKE: Did you restore it yourselves or did you have someone else do it?

S. KUNDE: We hired an architect, Andy Hall, who did most of the wineries. Andy Hall was Hall and Bartley Architects here in Santa Rosa, and then Rainer Nether was the general contractor. And the two of them — we had a great time with them and all the subs when we were re-doing the barn. Richard had a lot of great ideas. He said he wanted to keep the integrity of the barn, and Andy was great at that, so we just kept going.

I am horrible at plans. I don't do well. I have to visualize things and I have to see things, and when it's on a blueprint I just have a horrible time. So we stopped counting at Change Order Number 96, because I didn't want to get to 100. [laughter] But we far surpassed 100. I told everybody, "If you have an idea speak up. And don't say when the whole this is done you should have done this or you should have done that." So we had lots of input from everybody, and we had a great time doing it.

HICKE: Can we see it from here?

S. KUNDE: Yes, straight across. The redwood building with the windows in front.

[This interview was conducted in Saralee's office, 3351 Slusser Road, Windsor, California; the barn is visible from the office window.]

It is a barn that was here. It was started in 1900 and finished in 1901. Then we converted it. We started in 1994, and we moved in August 31st of '95 because Matthew was starting kindergarten. It was like, "OK, If we don't move in here now, we're not commuting." We moved from a mobile home on my parent's dairy in Two Rock into the barn. So it was lots of fun. We went from 1,200 square feet to 12,000 square feet. We bought here in 1988 and we started planting grapevines here in 1989, and then we started working on the barn and decided that we wanted to build a house about '92 or '93, and then we just kept going with it and kept going with it and then it was great.

HICKE: Most people pull out their hair when they are doing something like that but it sounds like, at least looking back, that you enjoyed it.

S. KUNDE: Oh, it was fun, yes. I enjoy building, and I think that comes from my father. You know, we had Sonoma Grapevines, the nursery, and we were at Dennis Lane always, then we built the whole new facility at Fulton and River Road. We had 60 acres there, and at one time I had 23 different permits going with the county of Sonoma. We didn't have a general contractor on that. That was me. I was coordinating with each one who was building whatever we were doing, and I loved doing all of that.

HICKE: These were offices you were building?

S. KUNDE: Grafting buildings, a cold storage building, a greenhouse and potting sheds, everything for the nursery business. We remodeled an old house into an office. It's the same as this. This was an old milker's house. When we decided to move out here, and we were going to sell The Farmery and Sonoma Grapevines, and that whole facility there, we said, "Well, we have to take this and turn it into an office." So we jacked it up and turned it around, because I wanted to see Mt. St. Helena and the Geysers out these windows and be able to look back across the vineyard. It's not real pretty today because the leaves are gone, but last week it was absolutely gorgeous, the different colors.

HICKE: This is truly a gorgeous place.

S. KUNDE: It's been fun; so construction is fun and I enjoy doing that sort of thing.

SONOMA COUNTY FAIR

HICKE: We need to back up to '79.

S. KUNDE: In '79, April Fools Day of '79, I went to work at Sonoma County Fair. Sonoma-Marin Fair — I had been there since '72 and the Sonoma County Fair was always so much bigger and it was a county agency, and Sonoma-Marin was a state agency.

Rich Thomas was retiring. He had been the livestock manager at Sonoma County Fair, and he had only done it for a couple of years. Mr. Jamison had been there forever, and he had retired and then Rich Thomas did it for a couple of years in the interim, and he was teaching at the junior college [Santa Rosa Junior College] at the time. He came and said, "You need to take this job in Santa Rosa and I need to stay at the junior college; are you interested?"

I didn't want to leave Petaluma; I lived in Petaluma. But Petaluma was kind of a dead end; until Bev was ready to retire there was no place else to go but the manager's job. And she wasn't going anywhere, so I said, "Might as well try."

That was when they had just started with the Sonoma County Harvest Fair — the Sonoma County Harvest Fair had started in '76, and I was interested in that, and that was how I really got interested in the wine and grapes and all of that was at the Harvest Fair. And that's where I met Richard, so it was a good move.

So I went there and that was a full-time job from '79 until '87 at the County Fair, and then in '88 I did the Harvest Fair of '88 then in January of '89 — because we bought here in December of '88 and we planted our first grapes in '89, and that was the end of my fairs. Richard said, "We'll build the fairgrounds here and you can run this." At that time he had the nursery, and the nursery was more than any one person could do. And it was crazy at Sonoma Grapevines grafting-wise. So he said, "You always want to work more than eight hours a day; you want to put in 16 hours a day. You might as well do it for us."

HICKE: Before we get started on that, can we go back to the fairs? You didn't talk about your responsibility at the Sonoma County Fair.

S. KUNDE: I was the livestock manager at the Sonoma County Fair, exhibits and premiums, and we went through the whole turmoil of the manager being fired. My gosh, it was a whole mess. I ended up doing concessions there and booking the carnival and just doing a ton of stuff at the County Fair.

My children to this day have a love-hate relationship. They love the fair, love to show — it's OK now to go with mom because they can go off on their own, but for the first 10 years or so they hated to go to the fair with me because I knew everybody there and we talked to everybody.

HICKE: And they had to hang around.

S. KUNDE: Yes. Catie finally got to the point where she would say, "I have to go to the bathroom, I have to go to the bathroom." And we would have just gone to the bathroom. That was her way of saying that we were not going to talk to anybody else. [laughter] Yes, I lived at the fairgrounds.

That was my life through high school and college and through the '80s. That was where I met my husband and so the fair was great.

I still love the fair. I still go out with the kids, and I am 4-H dairy leader, and at the County Fair our children have their animals there. They are there for two weeks, and they laugh, and they said, "Mom talks to everybody and she knows everybody." You do when you don't see people all year but you see them at the fair.

Fortunately our two children are both in 4-H, and they both are interested in their animals and so they show, and my brother shows and my nieces show, so you get to see a lot. At the County Fair there are more animals, and at the Harvest Fair there was the wine and grapes and the bounty in Sonoma County and all the Sonoma County products. I started all of those things with a display that I took to show other fairs how they could incorporate things that were grown in their county into exhibits and that kind of thing. So I worked a lot on that, which was fun. That was the early '80s; there weren't the appellations, the AVAs, [American Viticultural Area] that there are today. You know, Sonoma County was still struggling. It didn't have the identity that it has today in terms of a food and wine Mecca. Everything was Napa County when it came to wine, and food really wasn't part of it.

HICKE: Do you have a theory about why Napa County got the jump on Sonoma County as far as wine is concerned? There were early wineries here.

S. KUNDE: My theory is Robert Mondavi. He had a focus and he had the vision.

HICKE: And charisma.

S. KUNDE: He just kept going. And Sonoma County didn't have anybody. It really didn't. Napa is that straight line, and Sonoma County is so diverse. And we've splintered ourselves so much in Sonoma County. I think we're doing a better job now trying to bring things back together. Though the late '80s and early '90s there were all the different appellations and AVAs. I mean, Sonoma Valley was their own little hub over there in Healdsburg, and Alexander Valley was one and Russian River. So it really kind of fractured things, whereas now with the Wine Grape Commission everybody sees that there is a benefit in an umbrella in Sonoma County and that these are all different AVAs within Sonoma County, but if we use that big umbrella there is lots more identity there. So I think we are back on the right track again.

COURTSHIP AND MARRIAGE

HICKE: Tell me about meeting Rich.

S. KUNDE: I met Richard at the Harvest Fair. Of course the Harvest Fair had no money, and we needed to decorate, and in the early years there was hardly anything. It wasn't what it is today, that's for sure. The first few years, the first year for sure, they refunded more tickets than they sold.

The second year was not a whole lot better, and by '78 the attendance was but a few thousand or so. It was very small. I went there in '79 and just wanted to see things grow and work on things. So the Harvest Fair Awards Night was held at the Veterans Memorial Building across the street. They just set up tables and did wine tasting, and it wasn't very exciting to me.

The County Fair always had that Hall of Flowers, and the Hall of Flowers was always beautiful during the Sonoma County Fair, but that was the only thing that they ever used that building for all year. And they always did huge water ways; in the '70s and '80s there was a lot

of expense that went into that building to create the show each year. Then it was gutted again and started over for the next year.

I remember saying, "Why can't we have the wine tasting in the Hall of Flowers and decorate that again and use the water ways that are there and use some of the ambiance?" The board of directors said, "Sure, if you can get somebody to decorate it." I said, "OK, I can work on this." So I phoned around to borrow trees and borrow shrubs and what not.

Richard had Sonoma Grapevines and the nursery then, and they did bench-grafted vines, and he also did ficus and ferns and wandering jews and all those house plants. So I phoned him and talked to him and I invited him to come over and look at the Hall of Flowers. He knew all about the Hall of Flowers, but anyway he came over and looked.

I'll never forget. [laughter] Jim Pratt came with him because he worked for Rich then at the nursery. They came over and looked at everything and I told them what I wanted to do. I said, "You know, you have those greenhouses with all those plants; you can move them over here. We'll water them and take care of them." They needed to be there the Saturday night before for Awards Night. Then they would stay there through the next weekend which was the fair. So they would only be there a week and a day maybe.

I said, "You could have a plant showing and you could sell all these plants at the end." And I said, "And I have a big budget." [laughter] He said, "How much could you pay us to do this?" I said, "Five hundred dollars." He just shook his head. I said, "You really need to do this for the community; it would be really good and there would be all the wineries there, you know." So he did it, and it was good PR for him and I told him that.

I felt pretty guilty. I remember helping him. The first year he did it I helped him, because I always got wine barrels; I couldn't stand to do wine tasting just on tables. You had to have wine barrels and set something up so it looked neater, and I was always unloading a truck of wine barrels. He couldn't believe how much work I did out there to get things ready. I said, "I'll get you all the props that you need if you can set them up and do the displays." I had another friend, Joan Carrillo, who was really good at displays, so she helped him.

I knew the rest of his family. I had never met him before I called him that day. But I knew his brothers and his nieces and nephews because they all showed cattle. So they had Kunde Herefords and they were all in 4-H and his niece, Marcie, worked for me at the fair in the entry office.

Richard was much quieter, and he was the plant man and I didn't have anything to do with plants. I remember at a board meeting after the Harvest Fair I was thanking him and everybody was talking. Lou Foppiano Junior from Healdsburg was there, and Lou was a good friend and I always talked to him a lot. I made the comment that I had to go home and take care of my six kittens. I said "Six kittens." Richards swears that I said six kids. He thought that I was a single mother with six kids. He went away, far away. [laughter] You know that it was my cat that had six kittens under my bed.

Then the next year came time to decorate the hall for the fair and I called him again. He came back and he decorated.

HICKE: Did he ask how your six kids were? [laughter]

S. KUNDE: [laughter] No, he had found out that in the meantime just shortly before or after I had phoned him that I wasn't married and that I didn't have six kids. Then he entered the box social — we got him to do a lot of stuff then because he figured out that I wasn't married.

HICKE: He started hanging around?

S. KUNDE: Yes. Florence Call was a wonderful lady who worked for me at the fair. She was retired from the superintendent of schools. Florence said, "I think that guy likes you." "Oh, Florence go away." "Why else would he..." He would bring dinner over there and he would pretend to have a meeting where he needed to do this or that or something else. [laughter]

Then he entered the box social and he could cook very well, and he fixed all kinds of things. At the fairgrounds — I mean, the hours we worked, we never got out of there before eight or nine o'clock at night, before the fair it was 14, 16 hours a day at a time. So he would bring us dinner.

So we started dating then. I remember helping him float flowers, dahlias I think, and it was almost time for the building to be open to the

public and he was still putting each flower individually right side up in the water, and I am like, "Take that thing and dump it. We have to get with the program here. We don't have any more time." [laughter] And Richard, very meticulous, would take the flower out, shake it a little bit, and put it in there right side up. It drove me nuts. It still drives me nuts. "Just please get it done. I want to get to the end. I want to get to the bottom line."

HICKE: That's what makes him a good cook.

S. KUNDE: It is. And all the landscaping — I mean he wants you to come and look. Last week he was driving me nuts and I said, "Just plant the trees." "Well, what do you think? Should they go here or over there?" I said, "Just plant them. We're not going to be around long enough to see them grow anyway, so just get them planted so they are out of the way when we get tents in here or whatever we want to do for the Grove." He still wants you to look at things and he wants you to give input or whatever, and I'm more, you know, let's plough through it and get it done.

[Tape interruption]

S. KUNDE: So that's how I met Richard. That was 1982. I went there in '79 and he decorated first in '79 and '80. Then we dated in '80 and '81, and we were married in '82.

HICKE: That's a great story.

GETTING TO KNOW SONOMA GRAPEVINES

HICKE: OK. Then you stayed to '88.

S. KUNDE: Yes I stayed at the fairgrounds because I enjoyed that, and Richard was at the nursery. We bought a piece of property from his brothers. He was doing the rootstock business. I didn't know anything about any of that or the nursery. I knew the fairgrounds and I felt comfortable there and I liked the fairgrounds, but I got to know more about the nursery business.

One Valentines Day I gave Richard a video. That was in the '80s when so many people were planting vines, and Richard would say, "We're going to harvest wood today." And I would be lost. "What do

you mean we are going to harvest wood?" And all the terminology and stuff. I would be so mixed up, and I would say, "If I don't get it and I am married to you, how are all these other people who are going to plant these vines get it?" [laughter] So I did a video, and we used that video for years and years at every trade show. We had hundreds and hundreds of copies of it made and we gave it to customers.

HICKE: Bo [Simons] showed me that. It's very informative.

S. KUNDE: Yes, he has it up there. It was the history of Sonoma Grapevines and how you go about grafting and making cuttings and harvesting wood and then making budwood cuttings and rootstock cuttings, all of that. That really helped me to understand the nursery business and the grapevines, and it allowed me to ask questions that probably Richard would have never asked, or answered, or had the time or taken the time to really delve into it.

HICKE: You had it made?

S. KUNDE: Yes, Sonoma Video made it. I worked with them a whole year to get the whole cycle down. We went to our growing fields in Fresno. We bought property in Fresno because that was where the other half of our nursery operation was — in Fresno County — in Caruthers and Burrell, and so for every reason you could grow great wine grapes here, you could grow grape rootstock and vines down there because of the heat.

Here the climate was cool for grapes to hang long and have a long growing season, but down there with the heat the rootstocks just grew really well. So we spent a lot of time in those years going back and forth between Santa Rosa and Fresno. Richard spent a lot of time down there and a lot of time on the road in trade shows.

So we bought property down there, and then he kept saying, "We should buy property here. We could have an increase block and we could make our own cuttings," because we would buy cuttings from other nurseries or from other vineyards. We looked at lots of properties and we bought an increase block which is now Catie's Corner we bought that from Richard's brothers. He was partners with his two brothers in Sonoma Rootstock and we bought them out of that. It was called Jones Road then. That was a rootstock increase block.

SARALEE'S VINEYARDS

EXPANDING PROPERTY AND TRANSITIONING TO VINEYARDS

S. KUNDE: We got that and then we kept looking for property. This piece, actually only half of it, the first 150 acres, came up for sale. Jim Westphal, who worked next door at Sonoma-Cutrer, saw this sign go up, and he went to Sonoma Grapevines and he told Rich. Richard called me and said, "You better go look. There is property for sale on Slusser Road."

At that time there wasn't any Russian River Valley Winegrowers. There was barely the Russian River Appellation. They were still calling them appellations at that time, there wasn't AVAs. So I came out here and looked and we called the realtor. I knew Tom Nunes who had it for sale, and I knew he was getting a divorce and that was why he had to sell it. So we met with the realtor and we made an offer and we got it.

HICKE: Were there vines on this property?

S. KUNDE: Not a single grapevine. This was all dairy. It was a working dairy, and Tom had one of the premier dairy herds in the nation for registered Holsteins. And that field was all corn silage out there and pasture. Over around the barn where our house is now, that was all pasture, that hill, there were eucalyptus trees. That's what it looked like before anything was planted. That's a picture of an aerial shot there before we planted anything. [Identifies these sites out the window plus having aerial photographs of the sites]

So we started that summer of '89. I started a binder and we got going with everything we needed to do. [laughter] I knew where we were going to get grapevines but that was about it. And irrigation and wells, then we found out that we had methane gas in our wells here, and we had to get it out and pump it to the ponds and back out. You can see where all the vines have lost their leaves?

HICKE: Yes.

S. KUNDE: We hadn't bought any acreage on the south side of the property where the vines were this way. We had just bought the 150 acres on the north side. When we bought that and we talked to Tom we said, "If you ever want to sell the rest we'd be interested." At that time he wasn't, but it only took him to 1996 when we bought the 125 acres on this side of the property, and then we started developing this side of the vineyard.

HICKE: Do you have any information about the soils?

S. KUNDE: Out here is very rich, sandy loam, the flats. Then the hills are clay, lots of clay. What we did here was because we were planting everything for two crops a year. We were planting it for a crop for the nursery of wood. Everything here is on a four foot open "U" trellis system so that we could grow lots of wood with new canes for grafting and for budwood. So we did the trellis system so it would produce straight wood growing straight up and would be very good for grafting and for using at the nursery. Then we also wanted a grape crop. When we planted here we started out with 78 different grape varieties.

HICKE: How did you decide what to plant?

S. KUNDE: When we planted, the nursery was the show, the nursery being Sonoma Grapevines. We planted the majority of those for budwood. All the vines out here — when we first planted you could trace every single vine back to its mother plant at UC Davis [University of California, Davis].

HICKE: Did you get the 78 varieties from Davis?

S. KUNDE: Yes. All the cuttings came from UC Davis. There are hundreds and hundreds of different varieties to select from.

HICKE: How did you pick out the ones to plant?

S. KUNDE: Well, Richard did it, what he thought other people would order. Richard was great at speculation. Maybe he wouldn't have too many orders, but he would graft this and this and this, and then sell it to somebody. Sonoma Grapevines in its heyday sold I don't know how many millions.

HICKE: I have 11 million in one of the publications.

S. KUNDE: It was just unreal how many vines we grafted and sold, just millions and millions. A lot of it was pure speculation on Richard's part as to what he thought the industry was going to want or would buy.

When we first planted here we planted Meunier and Chardonnay and Pinot Noir because it was a cool climate and it was for sparkling wine mostly if we couldn't sell a lot of it for still wine. Well, the early '90s was when the drunk driving laws changed and you couldn't even give it away for sparkling.

Pinot Noir — when we got our first crop of Pinot Noir I was ecstatic when we got it sold for \$400 a ton. And that was 1992 and '93. Then the Meunier, no one wanted. The bottom just fell out of the sparkling wine market and it was horrible. Then of course I gave Richard a bad time because what did I know? I was a nice dairy girl who drank milk. I didn't know anything about these grapes. I listened to him 100 percent about what we should plant.

HICKE: Are we talking about grapes now or the rootstocks?

S. KUNDE: Grapes. Then he used the canes that the grapes grew on, he used that for budwood for the nursery. But the grapes you know — it was \$400 a ton for Pinot Noir that you can sell now for \$4,000 a ton. It's the same stuff. [laughter] It hasn't changed at all, same vines, same everything. But it's amazing what marketing can do and what a movie can do. In the Russian River Valley, we've certainly come a long way.

Anyway we sold the nursery in 2001. This year will be five years since we sold the nursery. When we got the second phase here it was '96 and in '97, that's when we got rid of all those other varieties, because we had duplicated everything that we had planted here at the nursery in Fresno. There we just grew wood. You cut the grapes off and dumped them on the ground because there was no demand for grapes from down there.

But you could grow great wood, and property down there was \$2,500 an acre and property here was \$25,000 an acre. So we had upwards of six or seven hundred acres in Fresno County when we had a lot going with Sonoma Grapevines and it was in its heyday.

Then we reduced those 78 varieties down to 18 here. And just having gotten through harvest with those 18, I wish we had two or three.

HICKE: Eighteen must be a huge amount to manage.

S. KUNDE: Well, it is, but there are lots of good things about it as well. Our harvest started just before Labor Day and we harvested from there through last week because not everything is ready at the same time. We had 18 varieties, and within those 18 wine grape varieties we had 54 clonal selections.

HICKE: Do you keep them all separate?

S. KUNDE: Yes, pretty near everything, especially the Pinots. Everybody buys by clone of Pinot. So when we pick Pinot Noir I have to be right there. We weigh out what we've picked and we mark it that this is for so-and-so winery. So it's lots of fun.

MANAGING THE HARVEST

HICKE: You told me that you were getting up at two in the morning.

S. KUNDE: During the height of our season, harvest-wise, we harvest during the night. That's when everything is cool. As Richard sys, "You created your own nightmare so it's all yours." [laughter]

HICKE: Thanks a lot. You had to put a note on every grape!

S. KUNDE: Yes, that's it. So the 54 different clonal selections of the 18 varieties I think we sold this year to 46 different wineries. I have more spreadsheets and more everything. This is our third harvest now with Joanie Patrick. It just got so that I couldn't do it by myself. I just couldn't keep the paperwork and couldn't talk to all the wineries. The guys would do sugar tests and give me the sugar results, and then by the time I got those calls to the wineries I was just oblivious to the world. I was so tired because I had been up since one o'clock in the morning and trying to go all day.

For three harvests now we've had Joanie, who has been a godsend. She does the sugar sampling and she does pH and Brix and acid and then she emails all the wineries so that they have all of the data by noon or one o'clock in the afternoon on a good day, sometimes it's

two or three, but it just depends where we are at. Then we can schedule harvest for the next day and the day after. Every once in a while I can get in a nap or at least I can get home and go to bed by seven-thirty or eight o'clock so that I can get up at one and go the next day. [laughter]

So it's challenging. I enjoy it. The guys love working at night; it's so much nicer harvesting during the night. It's cool and the phone is not ringing off the hook. I do all the scale tags, and we weigh every gondola and every bin. We have four crews with eight guys on each crew and then we have our little lights. We rent light towers from Hertz and pull those behind our equipment. It looks like a little army of ants going off in the morning when we take off. But they are great guys and we have good crews so it works very well.

HICKE: How many total acres do you have now?

S. KUNDE: Well, there are about 550 acres, but there are only about 400 planted. The rest is avenues and barns and whatever. We picked almost nineteen hundred ton this year, which is our largest harvest ever. Actually it was eighteen hundred and seventy-six, because it was a good year — 1876. [laughter]

Then we do all of our own deliveries. We truck everything. I schedule that and figure out who's driving where and who they are delivering to, then bringing back bins so we have enough bins for the next day if we are picking in bins, or in gondolas or whatever. So it's logistics.

Christine Margetts is in the office here and we bring her all the tags. Then she works on payroll. All the guys are on piece rates so it's a tremendous amount of paperwork for her for payroll. But it's over now. We're about there and we're going to get the last little Christmas grapes today for our jelly and hopefully the "Late Harvest" Gewürztraminer for Williams-Selyem Winery tomorrow or next week, and that's it.

Then we will start pruning and making cuttings. Now this year we will be able to sell — when we sold Sonoma Grapevines we signed a non-compete clause so we couldn't sell cuttings to anyone other than Vintage Nurseries for five years. So that's up this year so starting in January we can sell to whomever, and we have lots of people who want cuttings from here for grafting for their own nurseries and vineyards.

MARKETING AND THE FARMERY

HICKE: Let's back up to the early beginnings of the vineyards. Can you relate how the marketing evolved? How did you start selling?

S. KUNDE: Well, when we started — we bought here in '88, we planted here in '89, and then in 1990 we bought The Farmery, what we call The Farmery.

HICKE: Could you explain about The Farmery?

S. KUNDE: OK. The Farmery was an organic produce business. I had great visions. I wanted a produce business and a Sonoma County products store that would sell only Sonoma County products, anything produced, packaged or processed in Sonoma County.

We started with that, we bought the 60 acres there, and then that was 1990 so we actually harvested grapes from that property. There were 38 or 40 acres, something like that, of fruit there. We had Chardonnay and Gewürztraminer from The Farmery. We sold all of our grapes that year to De Loach Winery. [refers to a picture] These pictures kind of evolved — our grapes are in all of those bottles. That was 1990 over there and we only had the fruit from The Farmery and we sold it all to De Loach.

Then in '91 — that's up on the top [gestures to pictures] — we planted here in '89 and we got a little bit of fruit in '91 and that's with the cheese cutter in the picture. We sold to Adler Fels and to Arrowood, Chateau St. Jean, Kenwood and Sebastiani, and we sold fruit from The Farmery property and from here. We sold that year to Arrowood; I knew Dick Arrowood from the Harvest Fair and he wanted Viognier. Viognier was very new then and we planted it. Richard [Kunde] and I hand-harvested 567 clusters, and we took it to Dick Arrowood.

HICKE: Was he at Chateau St. Jean then?

S. KUNDE: He was still at St. Jean but he had started his own.

HICKE: So he wanted your grapes for Arrowood Vineyards?

S. KUNDE: Yes. So we started selling to him then. And we've sold to Arrowood ever since. We actually sell 11 different varietals to Arrowood. Dick is still like a kid in a candy store. I'm afraid this was the last harvest that we will see him at the crush pad because now it's sold again to KJ [Kendall Jackson]. He sold to Mondavi originally. Then Mondavi sold to Constellation, then Constellation sold it to Legacy. So now Arrowood, the winery, the label, everything are KJ.

HICKE: What's going to happen to Dick?

S. KUNDE: Dick is starting his own winery now.

HICKE: Another winery?

S. KUNDE: Yes another winery. He and Alis are hoping to do no more than 3,000 cases. But he loves it and he can't sit still.

HICKE: I did a long oral history on Dick some years ago. I'm not aware of what he is doing now but I'm interested in his activities.

S. KUNDE: He needs to do something. He can't just do nothing. So after they sold to Mondavi they bought property on Sonoma Mountain and built a home, and that's where the winery is going to be; they will have a Cab [Cabernet Sauvignon] vineyard there. He is just going to do very limited production. We've enjoyed a great relationship with Dick and Alis since 1990. So we started there and he actually put Saralee's Vineyard on the label. The first vineyard-designated wine that came from here was that year.

HICKE: He was really early with that.

S. KUNDE: Yes. Then it just kind of kept going from there.

I worked on the marketing end of it. I sent things, did packets, did brochures to send to all the wineries to sell grapes. I told them we would pick whatever they wanted, whenever they wanted it. We would farm individual rows for them or if they wanted special things done. We customized anything for whatever a winery wanted for whatever varietal.

HICKE: Did you plant a specific variety if they requested it?

S. KUNDE: No, not really, just for Arrowood. Arrowood wanted the Viognier and we worked with him more than anything on varieties. And then Richard needed Chardonnay wood so that's why we had so much Chardonnay. Then we really got into Pinot Noir and we did 23 clones of Pinot Noir, because Richard could see who was planting what from the nursery end and he needed the wood. So we would plant it.

We had field days, open vineyards to benefit the nursery, but it actually benefited us very well as well from the vineyard end, because people would come and we would do vineyard tours. We would do tastings of all the different varietals. At one point Doug Wilson at Hanna Winery made all 20-something — it wasn't 23 then, it might have been 12 or more — clones of Pinot Noir, individual wines. That was in the early '90s. Then we took that to do a presentation at Wineries Unlimited back in Pennsylvania. I was on the panel back there doing the presentation on Sonoma County products and the Harvest Fair. Then Richard was doing all the different clones of Pinot Noir.

HICKE: Who else was buying your Pinot? Did you sell to Davis Bynum?

S. KUNDE: We did. We sold to Davis Bynum and we sold to Gary Farrell. We sold to Sanford and to Pepi and we sold to Rochioli. So it just kind of grew. It grew by word-of-mouth. Somewhere around '93 Zellerbach filed for bankruptcy.

HICKE: Was Zellerbach a winery? I have never heard of it.

S. KUNDE: Yes. There was the Zellerbach Paper Company from San Francisco. This was his son who started a winery on McNab Ranch Road in Hopland. That's when I said that never again will we sell 300 ton of fruit to anyone. We had sold them 300 ton of Chardonnay. Almost all of our Chardonnay crop was going to them and they filed bankruptcy. I learned more in Bankruptcy Court than anything. We still were under contract to deliver to them even though they were in Bankruptcy Court, and we would still have to deliver our fruit to them.

HICKE: And not get paid?

S. KUNDE: And not get paid. We hadn't gotten paid from the year before, and it was like I said to Richard, "We will never sell that much to one winery ever again. I'll find wineries to buy it." And that's when I created my nightmare.

Then it's just kind of grown ever since. So actually it's a lot more fun and a lot more interesting to sell to a lot of different wineries. We had so many different varieties and so many different wineries to sell to, you could almost always get somebody to pick something each day all the way through harvest.

A lot of winemakers have a special style and they want this Brix and want this flavor and they want this and this. Some won't pick. They just hold on and hold on, and others pick earlier — the same variety. Every single winemaker is different in what they're looking for and what they do. It's worked very well for us to have so many different wineries to sell to.

The same thing happened again when De Loach went bankrupt. We sold them all of Matthew's Station Merlot. It was just 100 tons but at least we were able to hang on and recover from that. We finally got 57 cents on the dollar for that. If that was all your fruit and everything went to them and that was all you had, you would be in a world of hurts. So the first thing bankruptcy taught us a big lesson.

We did a lot of collections for Sonoma Grapevines when people were having a hard time. So you knew what wineries you sold wood to or sold grapevines to and who not to sell grapes to because you might not get paid. There were a lot of hard times and there still are. Cash flow, I mean keeping everything going is an art.

[Tape interruption]

WINERIES AND VARIETIES

HICKE: Do most of the wineries that you sell grapes to do vineyard designations?

S. KUNDE: No, not most of them, maybe half. We sell to Gallo; we sell to Clos du Bois. We sell to Kenwood, the Pinot Noir, I mean they make 20,000 case of Russian River Pinot Noir. The vast majority of everything we sell carries a Russian River Valley AVA.

HICKE: I know Dry Creek Vineyards has one of your designated vineyard Chardonnays.

S. KUNDE: Yes. Then Arrowood has had a lot, and Wild Hog and Joseph Swan and Lost Canyon. Alderbrook doesn't do one anymore, but they did do a vineyard designate. In fact, that is the one that won the sweepstakes at the Harvest Fair. The white wine sweepstake at the Harvest Fair was a Gewürztraminer from Saralee's Vineyard. That was fun and that was when Richard offered an award from Sonoma Grapevines to the vineyard manager of the sweepstakes winning white wine and the sweepstakes winning red wine. If it was a vineyard designate on the bottle then he gave a \$500 cash award to the vineyard manager. He had to give it to me. [laughter] It was priceless. I loved that. That was in 1999. That was lots of fun to get that from Richard in 1999.

There are several vineyard designates and then a lot go into Russian River Valley blends.

HICKE: Do you have various specific locations for different varieties?

S. KUNDE: It's pretty similar. We have this one block that lost all of its leaves. [gestures to photograph of plantings on flat land] That is a Chardonnay block that still has its leaves but this is a Pinot block that has lost all of its leaves. So that's Chardonnay, that is Pinot, and this is Chardonnay here. Then there is Malvasia Bianca, there's Marsanne, Roussanne, Viognier, and Gewürztraminer. The Syrah is mostly on the hill.

That gradual incline there in front of the house and the Weigh Station block are all Syrah. There is more Syrah on the hills here. The Wedding Hill block just to the west of our house is all Viognier. Trenton Station, we've done more reds at Trenton than we did anywhere. We did Syrah over there and Pinot Noir. We did some Pinot Gris over there, but that's the only white over there; otherwise it's all hills and it's pretty much all reds.

HICKE: Do you have any Zinfandel?

S. KUNDE: We do have Zinfandel there, a small amount on Lion Ridge that goes to Joseph Swan Winery.

HICKE: Any Cab?

S. KUNDE: We don't do any Cab at all. We struggled some years to get the Syrah and Merlot ripe.

HICKE: Syrah is a good alternative for Cab.

S. KUNDE: Yes, we have been very happy with that cool climate Syrah. There have been some very nice Russian River Valley Syrahs from Trenton Station. DuMOL does a beautiful Syrah.

HICKE: Where is Trenton Station?

S. KUNDE: Trenton Station is our vineyard just west of here. It's all hills. We bought it in 1996 and planted it. It was the first thing that we ever planted all on the hillside. And after most everything here being pretty flat, I was a nervous wreck to plant over there.

Richard sold out of his family business and sold his interest in Wildwood Vineyards in Sonoma Valley and so we did a 1031 exchange and we bought 140 acres at Trenton. It's beautiful. It's all hills going every which way. So we've done the Zinfandel, the Syrah and Pinot Noir, and then some Pinot Gris on the shady side of the hill over there, and that's worked out very, very well. So we're very happy with that. But it was interesting.

Thank goodness for Warren Dutton. He walked me through getting that planted, because I was just a nervous wreck. Because it faces River Road and I kept saying, "I don't want to end up on the front page of the Press Democrat; I don't want to be in the paper for the vineyard ordnance with the hill falling down because we've ripped it and whatever." And Warren said, "Don't worry, don't worry. We're fine. Do this and this and this." So we did and it's been fine.

VINEYARD MANAGEMENT TECHNIQUES

HICKE: Did you terrace?

S. KUNDE: That's Richard's favorite thing is his terracing. He loves to terrace and when you fly over it he thinks that's just the greatest thing that could ever be, to fly over it and see those terraced vineyards. But at Trenton we didn't terrace. At Trenton we just went straight up and over on Warren's recommendation. It's worked very well and we have a permanent cover crop over there and everything is seeded so there is no erosion. We were very careful with runoff and how we ditched water and done everything there to make sure the soil stays there because it's all gold ridge soil.

HICKE: What's gold ridge?

S. KUNDE: It's the type of soil from the Gold Ridge area. The soil is easily eroded. It's loose and will become powdery if you're not careful, and if you're not careful it will wash right away. So we've put in a definite permanent cover crop with everything over there, and then that vineyard, as well as this one — all of our properties are in the fish friendly farming program through the conservation district.

HICKE: What is that?

S. KUNDE: It's a tool to work with the Sotoyome/Santa Rosa Resource Conservation District, which offers this fish friendly farming certification program where you are sensitive to the environment, the environmental habitat and issues, creek beds and water ways and planted trees and no deer fencing. We don't have any deer fencing over there; we just put up with whatever comes there to visit. We had a resident lion for quite some time which cleared the deer population when we were just planting over there.

HICKE: Did you import him? [laughter]

S. KUNDE: No he came and he lived on Lion Ridge. That's how we named it. We have a great picture of the lion on Lion Ridge when we were just ready to plant, but he got two market lambs from a little girl's 4-H project down the road. And it was there a couple of years. They have a 50-mile territory, something like that, and the lion was around for quite a while, so we named it Lion Ridge. That's where the Zinfandel is planted, then Syrah is planted on the other side of it.

HICKE: Is this conservation group voluntary?

S. KUNDE: Strictly voluntary. So we got involved in that. We try to be sustainable. When we had The Farmery we had an organic produce business, and so many times we had to plow things under because we got bugs or beetles or something — the cayenne pepper didn't keep everything away; so there were just so many issues. We try to do as much as we can here with softer chemicals whenever we can. We do a lot with cover crops and add beneficial insects and that kind of thing trying to be as friendly and environmentally sound as we can be. Like this year in particular we would have lost everything with all of the botrytis in the

Chardonnay. So we just feel we need to have something that we can use because we can't lose the whole works. So that's where we're at.

HICKE: What other pests and diseases have you had in your vineyards?

S. KUNDE: Well, we have a couple of resident deer over here.

HICKE: They're pests.

S. KUNDE: Yes. They're pretty. We had kind of a food chain going over here. We put up owl boxes and we have owls everywhere that have taken pretty good care of the gophers. We had a tremendous gopher problem here when we first planted, when we moved here. And each one of these vines has its registration paper which traces back to UC Davis. To re-plant one of those vines you had to get more cuttings from Davis and graft them and keep up the maps. And every gopher must have eaten I don't know how many vines. It was a nightmare.

HICKE: Do they kill the entire vine?

S. KUNDE: Oh, they just take them down the hole with them. They eat the roots and all.

HICKE: They do more than just plow up the vineyard?

S. KUNDE: Yes. And there were gopher holes everywhere. So the owls have really helped with the gophers.

HICKE: Any damage to the grapes themselves?

S. KUNDE: We have a lot of Canadian geese that come in, and we actually put up construction grade orange fencing, the orange netting like, because the geese have a tendency to eat the Pinot Noir and the Syrah, and our vines are a little higher and the geese can just go up underneath and take a whole cluster at a time. So we have had to fence them out.

There are coyotes here and they eat our daughter's chickens. She had 12 hens and a rooster and we're down to a hen and a rooster now. The hen had four chicks when we went off to Kentucky, Catie and I, to show her heifer, and when we came back the four chicks were gone. There are fox out here, and lots of possums, skunks and raccoons and just lots of wildlife.

HICKE: Do they do any damage in the vineyard?

S. KUNDE: No. It's just the geese, the gopher and the deer. Those are our main culprits.

HICKE: How about diseases?

S. KUNDE: Knock on wood; we've been fairly sound with diseases. We haven't really had much at all. It's been very good. Richard's been very careful with all his landscaping with the glassy winged sharpshooter and the blue-green sharpshooter and what he brings in with all his nursery plants. We inspect them all before he plants, and he puts them in a quarantine thing over here when he brings them in so we can see what is going on.

We're careful when we bring equipment from one ranch to another because we have six different vineyard sites. We steam-clean everything when we come from one ranch to another, tractors and disks and that kind of thing, coming from like Coffey Lane or Mathew's Station, Catie's, Trenton or wherever it's coming from.

HICKE: Every time it moves.

S. KUNDE: When it comes back and forth. Mostly our damage here has been water related, because Mark West Creek runs right alongside of us here. Like last winter — we've had tremendous floods; you read in the paper that Slusser Road is the first one to go under in the wintertime. When you came in did you see the pumping station, the tower out here?

HICKE: Yes.

S. KUNDE: Well, that's hindsight, but those are up there because of water. In 1996 you couldn't see a thing out there but whitecaps. There was not a single vine or trellis system to be seen. Absolutely whitecaps. Tom Nunes, whom we bought from said, "How does it feel to have river-front property?" "You didn't tell us this when we bought it." He said, "I'll feed for you this morning because the heifers are over here." The kids' heifers were kept in the barn on this side. No way, we couldn't get out our driveway. We couldn't get over here to feed.

That's happened a couple times since, like last January, New Year's Day, we couldn't get over here to feed. We couldn't get out the

driveway. Slusser was totally under and all of our grove and everything there. So we have more water damage than anything. And Richard's planting along the berm that washes out. Mark West Creek just comes over the banks and away it goes. So every year something needs to be put back together again. Like with the Grove, this last year we started doing weddings and events in the Grove. We started renting it. We never rented it before.

HICKE: The Grove?

S. KUNDE: Richard's Grove. And that's down by the other driveway. We've always donated it to different charity events. The Sonoma County Wine Auction has been held there and the Wine Library does their fund raiser there, and Grapes to Glass for the Russian River Valley Winegrowers. We have a lot of different events that we donate it to.

We had so many calls for weddings, so we said that we needed to pay for some of Richard's landscaping that he had to put back in every year after winter. So we started renting it out for weddings. It works well but you can't get in there until — we won't book anything until June, the very end of May or the first of June because every year — I mean there are ducks that nest out there and there is just no way.

HICKE: Tell me about your trellising. Are you still on the "U"?

S. KUNDE: Yes. We've done some vertical trellis systems, because we haven't been as concerned about wood now that we've sold the nursery. So we have mostly vertical trellis at Trenton, the hills especially, and some here that we have re-planted and changed the varieties; we've done vertical trellis here. Right now we have Catie's Corner and last year we did a lot line adjustment and got 20 acres more there, and we are going to plant that this next year. That will be vertical. We're just kind of wide open.

The other thing you think about down the road is: where will our labor force be? Everything that we pick here is 100 percent hand-harvested, and with the four foot open "U" that's what you have to do.

HICKE: No machine harvesting at all?

S. KUNDE: No, none. So it's a little bit scary in terms of how much labor will be available and who will pick grapes in 10 or 15 years. Who knows?

HICKE: So this current immigration topic is crucial for you?

S. KUNDE: Definitely, for all of agriculture. In California it definitely is. As we re-plant — and you know the life span of a vineyard is probably 25 years or thereabouts, and this is our 17th harvest — so as we look down the road depending upon how much wood we sell and what we do when we re-plant, we'll probably do — everything here is eight by 12 spacing — we'll probably do a little tighter spacing and do vertical so that we have the option that we could mechanically harvest if we had to. Or our children, if they're so inclined or interested, that's what they can do. I should be around to do that but who knows?

HICKE: Do you do any hedging?

S. KUNDE: We hedged everything. We give everything flat tops, especially the Syrah; this year because the amount of spring rains, the soil had so much moisture it was the end of July before we put any water on, and that was fertigation, and we had hedged two times already just to keep vine growth in balance.

HICKE: Do you reduce the grape crop at all during the growing season?

S. KUNDE: Yes. There are 118,000 vines in this vineyard here. And each one of those vines is hand touched seven to eight times during the year. Our crew will start pruning now. We're done with harvest now, so in essence the end of this year is the beginning of next year and pruning. So in December we will go through and prune everything.

Then for us we'll also make some cuttings and put that in cold storage for sale in January and February for other nurseries or for vineyards. Then we go through and we tie to the fruiting wire and we tie vines. Then we go through once at bud break, and we've started in the spring, then we go through and we move wires and tuck the vines back inside, because they don't normally grow up nice and straight inside those wires. They have to be helped, so we tuck.

Then we go through again. Some we hand hedge, others we go through with the tractor and hedge. Then we go through and will pull laterals out to open up the canopy so we can get more light in there and more air circulation. Then we'll go through and we'll green drop. Once we have bunches there we'll go through and drop anything that's not turning at the same time. So if a cluster is way behind we'll

drop it so everything will ripen uniformly. So we go through and do that.

We go through and pull leaves to open up the canopy to get more exposure and more sun. Then, depending upon who we are farming for and what they want, we'll go through — we have some Pinot Noir that grow wings on the cluster. So they have a main cluster, and then two wings grow out. Some wineries want no wings whatsoever, so we go through and cut off all those wings.

HICKE: For only that winery.

S. KUNDE: For that winery's grapes. Then others — when we're shoot positioning we're looking at how many clusters per spur, and like in our Pinot Noir we only want three clusters per spur position, so we'll drop those extra clusters then. So each one of those vines gets that tender, loving care. Then we go back through just before we harvest and we pull all the leaves so the leaves are out of the way and everything is exposed.

HICKE: You pull all of the leaves?

S. KUNDE: Only in the fruiting zone, just that much [indicates about eight to 10 inches] along the fruiting wire. Then we go through and harvest. So there is an awful lot of walking and hand work in this business.

HICKE: You must have knowledgeable employees.

S. KUNDE: Yes, we are very fortunate to have a lot of employees and supervisors who have been here since we planted.

HICKE: That says a lot for your operation.

S. KUNDE: We rely on them, I rely on them. We meet once a week, or every other week this time of year, and go over what we're doing. Each one of our foremen, we have seven different foremen, and each one here is married now and each one owns their own home in Sonoma County. And each one has a family, so I try to instill in them that they need to learn English. And none of them spoke much when we started this.

We go through the Adult Literacy League and have English classes. I told them that I was way too old to learn Spanish and they came to America for a better life and they needed to learn English before their kids got in school so they could help with homework and do whatever.

All the agendas for our meetings — I do everything in English and they have to be able to read it and we work on English. Then we have English classes twice a week all year. They have come a long way and they are doing very, very well.

HICKE: You're producing Americans as well as grapes.

S. KUNDE: Well that's it. And all of their kids — I love it — at our gingerbread party especially all of their kids will come and they will make gingerbread houses and we're truly a family operation. Our kids are here and involved and their kids will come, and if they can't communicate and they can't talk to the teacher — they came for a better life and they need to work on it too. So it's worked out very well. The English classes have been great.

HICKE: That's a great program.

S. KUNDE: Well, I enjoy their families and I tell them, "My father was an Irish immigrant and he certainly didn't speak very good English when he got here, and it was hard for him too. But you have to work on this English." So that's worked out very well, believe it or not.

HICKE: OK. Is there anything more about equipment or vineyard techniques, that sort of thing?

S. KUNDE: We just try to keep up with the latest technology and what we can do to satisfy the wineries to make them happy.

HICKE: Could you more fully describe the term increase blocks?

S. KUNDE: A rootstock increase block is just where the mother plant is planted and then you make cuttings off of that for the rootstock that you graft the budwood onto to make a new vine. Sometimes we refer to it like these are increase blocks too, because they are increasing the production for new vines, for budwood. Now we just have increase blocks of budwood. We don't have any more rootstock increase blocks.

PROFESSIONAL AND COMMUNITY ACTIVITIES

SONOMA AG ART

HICKE: Now, Sonoma Ag Art?

S. KUNDE: Oh yes, Sonoma Ag Art. When I was at the fairgrounds I did an agricultural art show at the fairgrounds, and started the art show and art reception for the Harvest Fair, and initiated the poster art each year that the Harvest Fair does. In fact, really one of the key elements in my marrying Richard was the original poster art, because the very first year that we auctioned it off was 1980 and...

[Tape interruption]

HICKE: OK.

S. KUNDE: Richard liked art and had some collections of paintings as well. I wanted the original poster art to bring \$1,000, and I thought it should bring that much money at the art auction. So I was bidding away on it, and I was wandering around the room and watching who else was bidding, and he was bidding on it too. I didn't know him then hardly at all. I had met him and that was it, and everybody said, "Oh, Rich Kunde will probably buy that because he has an art collection and he likes agricultural art things."

I knew the auctioneer so I kept bidding him up and I was wandering around and then it was something like \$900 and some dollars and I wanted to go for \$1,000 and it was his turn to bid, and I was in and I think it was \$975 and it should have gone for \$1,000. [laughter] He was there and I was standing near him and I said, "It's your turn." He said, "No, I'm through." [laughter] There I was, \$975, what am I going to do with this? This is not going to look very good.

So I looked at the auctioneer and kind of smiled and said, "Keep going." Then I bid \$1,000 because that's what I wanted it to go for, and I walked over to him and I said, "Just smile because you just bought that. I'll pay for it but you go up there, because it's not going to look good if I bought this and I want you to go up and get it." It was kind of funny. [more laughter] I said, "You can be through but just pretend like this is yours." So he did, and he actually did pay for it then because he wasn't going to let me pay for it and him have it.

Did he tell you that story?

HICKE: No. [laughter]

S. KUNDE: Well, I remember that story because I almost died when he quit at \$975. You know, you get something in your head and it is like it's got to bring \$1,000 and that's got to set the pace for every other year and it has to work. I was determined that it was going to work. I made it work anyway. [still more laughter]

That was Ag Art, and then we bought several different paintings at the Harvest Fair. Then we did the art reception, and did an agricultural art show at the Luther Burbank Center when they had an artist gallery there.

Then at the Harvest Fair I bought a poster, well, actually the original art, and made posters out of it; it is a Jersey cow in the center, and it's a pig and a goose, and there are five geese across the bottom and Loni Down — she did fantastic art work and entered them in the Harvest Fair and sold paintings and photographs. So I bought this. I fell in love with it. I was going to have some kind of art shop or something with my Sonoma County products and do all of that.

I think I still have probably 2,280 or so of the 2,300 posters that I had made of this original poster art still in our house, because when we were going to do The Farmery I wanted to do the Ag Art with that. Then the nursery business, and the other thing that happened to us in 1990 when we bought The Farmery and I was going gung ho was that the economy just turned around in the early '90s and nobody was doing much of anything and the interest rates were really high.

Then we adopted Matthew, and Matthew was not so hard. He went everywhere mom went and did everything. We had all the plans drawn and had everything done to go ahead with The Farmery, and then in

1993 we adopted Catie. And by '94 that was the end of The Farmery — '95. We did the organic produce and I was over the top.

Catie was a very special girl who came — Richard and I are about as naïve as they come, and Catie didn't sleep for more than 20 minutes at a time. Well, Catie had drug residue from both birth parents and Catie — she really had a hard time. She never slept through the night until she was over five years old. She had open heart surgery when she was four. Catie was just my appendage. She wouldn't let me out of her sight.

She has had surgery at UCSF [University of California, San Francisco] for scoliosis and has titanium rods down her back now. She has developed into a wonderful young lady but it has been a lot of work, a lot of work. She has just been a special little girl who needed a lot of tender, loving care.

That was sort of the end of Ag Art, the end of The Farmery, and the nursery was going gangbusters — that's when we were grafting millions and millions of vines, and I was just trying to keep up. There was just no way. So Ag Art became a rootstock business and became our extension of the nursery in Fresno County. And we used Sonoma Ag Art as a "dba" down there and Sonoma Grapevines up here and we just tried to keep going.

Then my mother was with us. When we bought the second half here, that was 1996, we were planting this and in 1997 my mom got sick, and she was with us until '99 when she passed away. It just was go, go, go.

Then finally in 2000 — "We just can't do any more. We can't keep this pace up." That was when Richard had about had it with the nursery, and this vineyard is way more than enough for the two of us. We didn't need the nursery. So then we sold the nursery in January of 2001. Richard thinks he's retired, but we still make him do enough. [laughter] Then we moved the office out here and sort of got back to a more manageable life. In the '90s it was insane.

HICKE: There must have been a lot of stress.

S. KUNDE: For sure, for sure. Then with two children and trying to keep the business going, the vineyard and plant — it's a good thing — I could never do it today.

SELECT SONOMA

HICKE: You had some other things going like Select Sonoma.

S. KUNDE: Oh yes, very involved in that.

HICKE: Tell me about that.

S. KUNDE: That was the agricultural marketing program. That started in '89 or '90 to market all of the products of Sonoma County. We donated office space to them for years at The Farmery when we had the building there and we marketed Sonoma County products, and I was on the board of directors and was past president. We really worked at that.

We did the chef's tasting here in the Grove to bring chefs from throughout the bay area to meet with farmers face-to-face. We had some wonderful experiences with all of that getting produce direct from the farmer to the restaurateur, to the chef and just got some really great relationships going. It worked out very well for us in terms of selling all the produce all over. Restaurants are very difficult to collect from and to deal with.

HICKE: To collect from?

S. KUNDE: Oh, restaurants are here today and gone tomorrow. And cash flow is horrible. So many restaurants would end up on a COD [cash on delivery] basis. Leonard Diggs, who is now the farm manager at Shone Farm for the junior college, was our farm manager for the organic produce, and he was fantastic. I just love Leonard. After we decided we were going to build the nursery at The Farmery property there and go out of the organic produce business, then he tried it on his own.

We sold him equipment and he came — it's been a month or so now — he just came with a cashier's check for \$10,000 for Richard and I. He said, "It's taken me over 10 years but this is what I feel I owe you." He had us all in tears. He's just a wonderful, wonderful person. He couldn't make it on his own either just trying to farm. Because of the price of property in Sonoma County, trying to do organic produce versus doing grapes in the '90s — there was just no comparison. What people would pay for a head of lettuce versus what they would

pay for a bottle of wine — it took us a while but not too long to figure out that the produce had to go by the wayside. We planted all of it to vines and did the nursery operation there.

Select Sonoma County was — the board of directors really worked hard and got a lot of exposure for Sonoma County and Sonoma County products. So that was very interesting.

HICKE: Is it still in being?

S. KUNDE: No, it disbanded four years ago, five years ago, something like that. When the wineries really took off — the wineries were all a part of it in the beginning and then they kind of carried the produce and the other products. Then it was like Sonoma had achieved what it needed to in terms of marketing, and the ones who needed it couldn't afford to pay enough dues to keep it going, and the ones who could afford it didn't need it. So it just kind of went by the wayside.

The Farm Bureau bought the rights to the Select Sonoma County logo and the marketing rights and they are exploring now what they might do with it through the Farm Bureau to promote Sonoma County. Some of it may surface again now that we have the Sonoma County Wine Grape Commission. But in the late '90s and early 2000s all the different appellation groups and American Viticulture Areas, AVAs, you know each one was promoting their own and not so much Sonoma County. It was Russian River Valley and Dry Creek, Alexander Valley, Sonoma Valley and their brand products rather than the county as a whole. And now that the marketing order has passed and commission is going and the vintners are working together with the Wine Grape Commission and the Tourism Council, I kind of see Sonoma County coming together as a cohesive group. So maybe there is a place for more with what Select Sonoma County did. So we'll see what happens.

HICKE: Sonoma County is well ahead of Napa County in the food business.

S. KUNDE: Definitely. But it's hard. We were marketing on a local scale and then a Bay Area scale, and then we did some national marketing. We went back to New York and did programs back there, because we were shipping produce to them from The Farmery and Select Sonoma County was doing things back in Washington, D.C. and in New York which was really ahead of its time, because there was not enough product to go on a national scale. We could barely keep up with

demand here, and the demand was not so much here, because local people would not pay that price for what someone in New York would, and people here thought — we did so many surveys at the farmers' market and at grocery stores — they thought buying local meant buying it at your local supermarket.

In the old days people just didn't get — and still the vast majority doesn't get seasonality, what's in season now and where it's coming from. They want tomatoes all year around. You don't get tomatoes year around that are grown locally. They are hot-house grown or whatever. You know, there is so much education to do, much of it is how it is perceived and price point as far as who's buying it. Hopefully — I mean Sonoma County is definitely on the map and way more visible than it was.

HICKE: I think they should consider getting more visitors to come so if they have Sonoma cheese or Sonoma wine on the East Coast that they could come out here and visit the area where the cheese or wine was produced.

S. KUNDE: They should for sure.

HICKE: I don't know if that is a good thing or bad thing. [laughter]

S. KUNDE: Well, as long as they go back home and don't stay I think it's good. [laughter] But a lot of them stay. I was just reading in the paper this morning about people who sold here at the height of the property and housing boom and bought elsewhere and now want to come back. Some are happy who went and others miss California and Sonoma County and want to come back.

HICKE: What is the most important organization promoting the Sonoma wine industry? Richard talked about the Grape Growers Association quite a bit.

S. KUNDE: Well, he was the original president or the first president and was on the founding board. I served on the board as a director for a number of years.

ACHIEVEMENTS AND HONORS

HICKE: I have a list of your achievements here. Why don't you have a look and see if there are any you would particularly like to talk about.

S. KUNDE: OK. The Agriculturalist of the Year from the Farm Bureau is probably significant as you were voted on by your peers at the Farm Bureau in terms of contributions to Sonoma County agriculture.

HICKE: That's impressive.

S. KUNDE: Yes, that and the Friend of Sonoma County Agriculture — Richard and I won that together.

HICKE: What year was that?

S. KUNDE: That was 1991. When you go back and look at these dates, it's been a while, hasn't it?

HICKE: Yes.

S. KUNDE: Last year I was being honored by the Junior College Foundation. Then they named the showcase area at Shone Farm in honor of Richard and I. And that was kind of a humbling experience. Last week was the dedication, and I said, "Oh my, Richard, do you realize that almost everybody else that has something named here has passed away and we're probably the only ones here to see our names in gold letters in the middle of that arena?" That's just a fantastic facility. It's just beautiful. Have you been up there?

HICKE: No.

S. KUNDE: It's the Warren G. Dutton Jr. Ag pavilion at Shone Farm, and the junior college has their farm — you can see it now, it's beautiful at night, it's a little hard to see during the day. It's back up here on the hillside. [gestures to the location] Warren Dutton, who was just a very good

friend and agricultural leader in Sonoma County and served with me as founding board members on the Russian River Valley Winegrowers, the building is named after him. He passed away of a massive heart attack in October of 2001. That would be five years now.

Anyway they named the building in his honor because he had started the Ag Trust at the junior college to promote agriculture for generations to come and to have an endowment and have money coming back into the community. The first fundraiser was held in Richard's Grove here at our place. Warren and I co-chaired that, and that was honoring Richard L. Thomas on his retirement.

I think we raised like \$40,000 for the Ag Trust that year, and that was fantastic for that point in time. Since then they have raised \$1.4 million to build this building — not to build the building, the bond measure built the building, but to equip the building and to have this showcase area and the kitchen and the winery. It's just a fantastic facility that the community will use. They will use it for classrooms and for trade shows and a number of things.

It's right here in the Russian River Valley, which is near and dear to all of us. So it's pretty exciting to see it completed, and last week was the dedication; it was very nice. Warren's widow, Gail — she is a good friend, and she was able to speak and his sons — it was just really, really nice. We can finally see something. The bricks and mortar are there. It's completed and we'll be able to use it for various events. Standing there in front of the podium where they did all the speeches and dedications right behind that is where it says Rich and Saralee Kunde Showcase Area. It just seems kind of strange. So that was very nice.

HICKE: What about the Russian River Valley Winegrowers?

S. KUNDE: The Russian River Valley Winegrowers — I was the first president of the Russian River Valley Winegrowers.

HICKE: When was it formed?

S. KUNDE: It was formed in 1995 and I was a past president from 1995 to 1996.

HICKE: You must have helped get it started.

S. KUNDE: I did. We had the first meeting at Shone Farm in the little Belden Center, and we had 19 charter members sign up that day, and they put up their \$100 each to form an organization. I started all the book work for it, and we formed 501C6. I ended up as president and Warren was vice president, and Rod Bergland was very instrumental in the formation and he was on the board for a term limit of nine years. Millie Howie was our first "PR" director and also a Wine Library founder.

We donated office space from the very beginning. They still have their office here in our office for the Russian River Valley Winegrowers and the Russian River Winegrowers Foundation. It's a very hands-on working board. We're trying to hire an employee now; we've never had an employee. We've just had contract people and a marketing director, Manny Kaseburg, and she's done an awful lot to put Russian River Valley on the map and get the AVA known and she promotes the Russian River Valley everywhere. Judy Groverman-Walker handles all our events like Grape to Glass and Crab and Fennel.

This year, 2006, we formed the Russian River Valley Winegrowers Foundation. [501C3] I am the first president. Our purpose and mission is to work with agricultural education. The group is marketing the wine made from the El Molino High School Vineyard — one plus acre of Pinot Noir on the high school campus. The funds made will be distributed in the form of grants back to the El Molino High School agricultural/viticulture programs.

We've always used "Sonoma County's Russian River Valley" for everything that we have done so that people will know that we are part of Sonoma County. So that is one strong point that we have done for a number of years, ever since the beginning. We're happy to see the Sonoma County Wine Grape Commission and we're working a lot with them.

HICKE: Could you discuss the Sonoma County Wine Grape Commission?

S. KUNDE: The Sonoma Wine Grape Commission was voted on just this past year in the spring and became a reality where all of the growers have a voice and a vote. One-half of one percent of the sale price of all grapes goes into the commission for marketing Sonoma County.

HICKE: So it is a marketing order.

S. KUNDE: Yes. It replaces the Sonoma County Grape Growers Association. The Sonoma County Grape Growers Association is sun-setting this year. We paid dues this last year so this is the last year we pay dues to the Grape Growers. Nick Fry, who is the director of the Sonoma County Grape Growers Association, is now the president, or something like that, of the Sonoma County Wine Grape Commission.

HICKE: What is the difference between the two?

S. KUNDE: [For the commission] everyone has to pay. It is not a voluntary membership-based organization any more. If you sell any more than 25 tons of grapes from Sonoma County, the winery that you sell to deducts one-half of one percent of the sale price of those grapes from your check and sends that to the commission. In the Grape Growers Association as with any member-driven organization, there are people who belong and who pay dues and who work on things, and then there are others who are just along for the ride. So this to me makes it an even playing field. Everybody has to pay.

There will definitely be more money to market Sonoma County, and we will market Sonoma County as Sonoma County. They're working with the Vintner's Association and with Tourism Council and pooling the money together will get us a lot more than working as individual groups, so I think that's going to be really good.

We were advocates, both Richard and I, to get the Wine Grape Commission started. In 1990 they put it up for a vote and it failed. Richard worked on that a lot in the beginning. It never passed then, so here we are in 2006 and it's finally passed. It's exciting, and we'll see what that can do. So it's going.

[Tape interruption]

S. KUNDE: I'm still on the Sonoma County's Winery Foundation Board and that has to do with Sonoma County vintners. Actually we're calling it the Sonoma County Vintners Foundation Board now, and that is the one that puts on the Annual Showcase of Food and Wine for Sonoma County. So we meet and work with the vintners to showcase Sonoma County, again trying to make that happen. So there are some exciting things for this year, some changes, and they've done a wonderful job with the Taste of Sonoma County at McMurray Ranch. It's just a beautiful setting to showcase all the wines and the foods from Sonoma County, everything produced here and brought into shops

and they just kind of married the food and wine aspects of Sonoma County, which is what we do best.

You know, we are not just a winegrowing region; we've got all of the foods that go with it, and some excellent restaurants and chefs, and the junior college culinary program is doing just some fantastic things. And also now they're using the Shone Farm gardens for their products. They have a huge kitchen now at Shone Farm, and they're going to have classes taught out there. So it's a whole lot of putting all of those things together for food and wine for Sonoma County.

HICKE: Are you involved with Slow Food?

S. KUNDE: I'm a member of the Russian River Chapter, and I bought a turkey at the last Slow Food auction because it was one that the 4-H kids raised.

HICKE: A live one?

S. KUNDE: Yes but it's going to be for our Thanksgiving. It's a Heritage Bird that the 4-H kids raised. Slow Food was able to partner with 4-H and FFA to get the birds raised for the auction which was in October. Jim Reichardt is processing all of them where he processes his Liberty Ducks, and we'll have a Heritage Bird for our Thanksgiving dinner. Yes, Slow Food. I just need a few more hours in the day and a few more days in the week to enjoy Slow Food.

I said to Richard, "The harvest is done I just...." This last weekend — this is kind of sad to say, but Saturday and Sunday was the first Saturday and Sunday that we have been home since last April. We weren't picking and there wasn't an event going on or something.

Our two children are very involved in 4-H, and I am on the 4-H Foundation Board and also a 4-H leader for a dairy project, and then the fairs play a big part in all of that, and 4-H meetings, and I am a coach for their dairy bowl team and that's started up again now.

Matthew has Brown Swiss cattle and Catie has Jerseys and Holsteins, so there is a junior Holstein club and there is a junior Jersey club. We snuck away for the World Dairy Expo in Madison, Wisconsin with Catie and her little heifer. We shipped her back there and she showed back there, and then we flew back there for her to show and then came back home. Then her heifer went on to Louisville, Kentucky and

we flew back there on a Friday and came home on Tuesday morning, and she did so well.

She got second in the nation at Madison in the junior show and she got third at Louisville in the nation with her little heifer. The heifers have been a calming thing for Catie, so we have to make time to do that. I want to make time to do things with them.

This year Richard and I in February during spring break went off to Washington, D.C. with the family. Actually we flew to Washington, D.C. and went to the White House and met with Congressman Thompson and did our thing there and saw all of the D.C. sites.

Then we took the train from there to New York and saw a New York play and went out to Long Island and visited old customers from Sonoma Grapevines and showed the kids all about. They have the ski week at Forestville School, and we get a one-week vacation in February; so that's our vacation time, February, to try to do something.

Summertime is 4-H and the fairs and events in the Grove and all of these fundraisers and what not. So we're trying to develop what we are going to do this February. It's coming and we'd better start figuring pretty soon here. Anyway there will be plenty of time to sit and rock in the rocking chair somewhere down the road. [laughter] My mother used to say that the cemetery is full of good housekeepers. [laughter]

HICKE: OK, is there anything we still need to cover?

S. KUNDE: I can't think of a whole lot else.

HICKE: I'm sure there might be other parts of your memorable career, but I think we covered quite a bit.

S. KUNDE: Yes. Did Richard talk this long?

HICKE: No, not quite.

S. KUNDE: Did he tell you about planting daffodils?

HICKE: No. I'd like to hear about that.

S. KUNDE: He didn't tell you that I get all the credit but he does all the work?

HICKE: No, no. I thought it was your project. [laughter]

S. KUNDE: That's the best part, but it is sort of my project. When we had Sonoma Grapevines and The Farmery we planted and adopted the highway and did all the daffodils and planted tons and tons of daffodils literally. We were up over 20 ton that we had ordered from Holland. It wasn't just us. I took care of ordering them every year because we had cold storage and it works fine. We would order daffodils, and we forced daffodils and narcissus and tulips for the nursery. We had cold storage and we could handle them at the nursery, so it worked very well.

We got lots of different organizations to plant daffodils, Martinelli Winery and lots of people on River Road, De Loach. Everybody ordered daffodils and planted. And usually they're up between Valentine's Day and barrel tasting weekend. The Russian River Wine Road puts on the barrel tasting weekend, and then that's our Russian River Valley Winegrowers Crab and Fennel Fest and somehow I ended up as the chairman of that for the last three years. Anyway so we do the Crab and Fennel Fest. There are lots of people everywhere that weekend, and so there are daffodils all over, and the gophers don't take them. The tulips the gophers will take. Daffodil bulbs the gophers don't take. It's kind of neat. So we get a lot of good things from the daffodils.

Everybody thinks that the landscaping and daffodils is all me. Well, all I used to do is to get them ordered and get them delivered to everybody and then Richard would plant them. So it's a running joke with Saralee and the daffodil bulbs and how much she has done with the daffodils, and Richard planted all of them.

HICKE: Maybe it was your idea?

S. KUNDE: Well, it was my idea, kind of. But he had the nursery and the cold storage and we got them going, so now we've scaled back some, because we have so many planted, so we don't do nearly as many. But the bulbman still comes once a year from Holland to take orders.

HICKE: So you still do some?

S. KUNDE: Yes, we still do some, different kinds. Richard has planted — out here come spring it is absolutely gorgeous. He's got bulbs coming up everywhere under all of these plants and shrubs and everything. He's done all the landscaping so that there's something blooming pretty

nearly year around. And in springtime when all the daffodils come, it is beautiful.

We did lots of daffodils for the Cancer Society. They did all those Daffodil Days, and I chaired that for a number of years. That was fun. The funniest thing with that is when you get all those daffodils — have you seen all the cut daffodils when they had vases and they sold them for donations every year?

HICKE: No.

S. KUNDE: You could order them through the Cancer Society and they come, and when they come they come packed and they are not open at all. They look like asparagus. I sent somebody down to get asparagus, literally, out-of-the box, the cold storage box, when we had at The Farmery and they brought up a box of daffodils. [laughter] And it was like, "No, no, those are not asparagus; those are daffodils." That's what they look like. They're just little green stalks. They were all closed and were just little green stems. It was just priceless. Yes, the daffodil bulbs, we did that for quite a few years at The Farmery, and we dispersed them from there all over the county.

HICKE: You have done many nice things, Saralee.

S. KUNDE: I have lots of good memories of lots of good things. The one nice thing that I can say is almost anything that I have ever done — if I've asked for help, and I have asked for help from lots of people, no one has ever turned me down. I mean — "Well, OK. If you have time I guess we have time too. OK, so we've got to get it done." And that's the best part of Sonoma County and the Russian River Valley: everybody pretty much pitches in.

HICKE: That's great.

S. KUNDE: And a lot of people do a lot to get things done.

HICKE: And a lot of things did get done.

S. KUNDE: That's for sure.

HICKE: Thank you very much for your time. I very much appreciate it and I know how busy you have been.

S. KUNDE: That's OK. Hopefully they got those Christmas grapes picked and delivered. [laughter]

II. RICHARD KUNDE

PERSONAL BACKGROUND

ANCESTORS AND EARLY DAYS

[Interview November 13, 2006]

HICKE: Let's just start with when and where you were born.

R.KUNDE: I was born on September 6, 1942 in San Francisco at Children's Hospital, I believe.

HICKE: Did you grow up there?

R.KUNDE: No, I grew up on a ranch in Glen Ellen, Wildwood Vineyards. My mother almost died in childbirth, so that's why the doctors had her deliver me in San Francisco at the hospital. Everyone was living at the ranch, but that's why they had her go to the hospital.

HICKE: Was she okay then?

R.KUNDE: Yes.

Louis Kunde: Early Grape Grower and Vintner

HICKE: Now, let's go back to talk about some of your ancestors. I know some of them planted grapes here.

R.KUNDE: Yes, my grandfather came from Germany.

HICKE: From what area?

R.KUNDE: I believe around Saxon, Germany. He was involved in farming in Fulton and Geyserville. He eventually moved to Glen Ellen. His wife was born in Dresden. Her name was Marie.

HICKE: Do you know about when he came?

R.KUNDE: No, but I believe it's in the William Heintz history. He was cited in the report to the state legislature about the status of the phylloxera, what was happening in the vineyards with regard to phylloxera. I think it was 1885. He was one of the first growers to plant rootstock to try to combat the phylloxera that was killing all the vineyards.

HICKE: You came by your career rightfully!

R.KUNDE: I found that in the library at UC [University of California] Davis.

HICKE: Good. Could we get your grandfather's name please?

R.KUNDE: Louis Charles Kunde.

HICKE: Do you have any idea what varieties of grapes he planted?

R.KUNDE: I know one was Zinfandel. The standard grapes — there was Zinfandel, Petite Sirah, a lot of the more common grapes. Although he did put in some Cabernet [Sauvignon] and was credited with being one of the first to put in the other varieties.

HICKE: Mostly reds, it sounds like.

R.KUNDE: Yes.

HICKE: And what did he do with the grapes?

R.KUNDE: They were sold, and he actually had a winery. The winery was in existence until World War II.

HICKE: Did it have a name such as the Kunde Winery?

R.KUNDE: It was Wildwood Vineyards.

HICKE: Oh yes, I see. This was obviously your paternal grandfather.

R.KUNDE: Yes.

HICKE: What was your maternal grandmother's name?

R.KUNDE: Theodora Houweling.

HICKE: Did she come over from Germany too?

R.KUNDE: No, she came from The Hague, Holland.

HICKE: Did your parents get married here?

R.KUNDE: Yes, and my dad was born in Geyserville.

HICKE: Your mother must have lived around here somewhere.

R.KUNDE: Yes, she lived in San Francisco, and she would come up here on the train. I think they met at Boyes Hot Springs, the big vacation spot in the summer.

HICKE: Did you know your maternal grandparents?

R.KUNDE: No.

HICKE: They were both gone?

R.KUNDE: Yes. I didn't know them.

Parents

HICKE: Well, tell me about your dad.

R.KUNDE: His name was Arthur; he went by Big Boy. He was a large man, and everyone always called him that. Everyone in the whole Sonoma Valley and Sonoma County referred to him as Big Boy, and my mother was always called Honey. Everywhere.

HICKE: Sounds like they were congenial people! And what was your mother's name?

R.KUNDE: Catherine Mary Margaret Mageline.

HICKE: What did your father do?

R.KUNDE: My dad was a farmer and grew everything from corn to grapes. Had vineyards, had a dairy, just a general-type ranch. In those days you farmed a lot of things, not just one thing.

HICKE: Did he go in and out of those businesses or do them all at once?

R.KUNDE: He was doing all of them at the same time. I can remember he would take me to grammar school — St. Frances Solano — in the morning, and we would deliver whey to Vella's Cheese Factory in Sonoma along the way. It's famous. They make great dry Jack cheese. It's to die for.

Early Schooling

HICKE: Is there anything especially memorable about grammar school?

R.KUNDE: Well, I don't think of anything.

HICKE: Then after that, what did you do?

R.KUNDE: I went to Santa Rose High School until Montgomery High School opened up. Then I went to Montgomery.

HICKE: Where is that school?

R.KUNDE: It's in the eastern part of Santa Rosa.

HICKE: What were your favorite subjects in high school?

R.KUNDE: Oh, probably science. I certainly didn't care for English; I know that.

HICKE: What about after-school activities?

R.KUNDE: Not much. I had birth marks [indicates face], and so during the time I was in grammar school and high school I was continuing going to San Francisco to have surgery. So I was out a lot. That restricted a lot of what I did.

Growing a Home Garden

HICKE: How about chores around the ranch? Did you have any particular responsibilities?

R.KUNDE: I worked around the ranch. I also developed a garden around our home, because my mother never had a garden, and she always wanted a garden.

HICKE: Flowers or vegetables?

R.KUNDE: Well, both; a lot of flowers and a lawn. That sparked my interest in horticulture. I love gardening; that's what I do here.

HICKE: On a somewhat larger scale!

R.KUNDE: Just about every piece of the property has something planted on it.

HICKE: Oh, you have flowers in the vineyard?

R.KUNDE: Yes, and around them.

HICKE: No doubt all those pumpkins out on the doorstep are from your garden.

R.KUNDE: Oh, yes.

HICKE: Nice. They're really colorful.

R.KUNDE: We grow all the pumpkins and gourds and winter squash. Most of those have walked away now.

HICKE: That's pretty much what you had in your garden when you were growing up?

Vineyard Chores

R.KUNDE: Yes, and of course we had vineyards too. I worked in the vineyards too.

HICKE: What was your job in the vineyards?

R.KUNDE: Just about everything, from pruning with the crew to picking up rocks — you name it.

HICKE: Grafting?

R.KUNDE: Yes. We did a lot of field budding.

HICKE: No doubt your dad learned these things from your grandfather.

R.KUNDE: Yes, I'm sure it came from my grandfather.

HICKE: Did he bring this knowledge from Germany?

R.KUNDE: Yes. There were small farmers all over.

More on the Kunde Family

HICKE: And your mother: what did she do?

R.KUNDE: She was a secretary for Southern Pacific Railroad.

HICKE: Did they have an office around here?

R.KUNDE: She worked in San Francisco, so she lived in San Francisco.

HICKE: Do you have brothers and sisters?

R.KUNDE: I have one sister and three brothers. Two of them have passed away. So we had a family of five.

HICKE: Was any one of these family members particularly influential?

R.KUNDE: I think all of them were. My brothers, especially Fred and Bob, were extremely hard-working, and when they took over the ranch from my dad, I could see how they worked night and day, seven days a week. They expanded the properties, bought property up in Mendocino County and other properties and developed them. So they greatly expanded on the home ranch.

HICKE: What are the names of your other brother and your sister?

R.KUNDE: Teddy, or Theodora, goes by Sis. And Louis [Lou] Kunde is my other brother. He did not work on the ranch; he worked for a company called MGM which makes emergency brakes for trucks, and he was a sales representative.

HICKE: Was that company located around here?

R.KUNDE: It was in Cloverdale. It's still in Cloverdale.

HICKE: I assume you didn't have time for part-time work when you were in high school, other than what you did on the ranch.

R.KUNDE: No.

UNIVERSITY OF CALIFORNIA, DAVIS

Horticulture and Viticulture

HICKE: You went to the University of California. How did you decide what you wanted to do and where to go to university?

R.KUNDE: Well, what I wanted to do — well, I changed my mind. I applied to various schools and was accepted everywhere, but I went to Davis after visiting it for Picnic Day. Picnic day is kind of an open house. That sold me on the school. I guess my ultimate goal was to have a nursery or garden or something in horticulture.

So I took a major in landscape horticulture. That was the department I started in, and I stayed in that department until my senior year, when I switched to viticulture in my last year. But all along I was taking viticulture courses as well as horticulture courses so that I could change. Then I think it was during Easter vacation in my junior year that the horticulture department took us on a tour visiting companies throughout the state, I guess to give us an idea of what we could do with our degree.

HICKE: These were private companies?

R.KUNDE: Yes, private companies. I think I saw the light, and after that, I decided I should get a degree in viticulture. I could do more in viticulture than I could in horticulture. So I switched.

HICKE: The opportunities in horticulture didn't look so good?

R.KUNDE: Well, there were a lot of opportunities, but I thought there were more opportunities available in viticulture.

Luther Burbank Art & Garden Center

HICKE: Was the Luther Burbank garden open when you were growing up?

R.KUNDE: Oh, yes, they were there, and we visited them. In fact, when I was doing research at the library at Davis, I found a book about Luther Burbank and his working with grapes. One of the grapes he worked with was called Christmas. The reason it was called Christmas was it was a Concord-type grape but it was extremely late ripening. In fact, it's one of the only things left in our vineyard at the moment.

HICKE: You're growing it?

R.KUNDE: We found it. Davis has an unbelievable collection of grapevines. Dr. [Harold] Olmo, when he was alive, collected native species throughout the world. They're gone now, other than what you can find at Davis. It's a great breeding program. He saved the genetic material from all over the world. So he had Christmas in the collection.

I brought some here, and we actually put in just one row. Now we have three or four rows. Every year with the help of Joseph Swan Winery and the Kozlowskis Farms we make Christmas jelly and give it to people. We've given it to Luther Burbank Home and Gardens and they've sold it during their Christmas open house. So that's my connection with Luther Burbank.

Dr. Olmo just recently passed away.

Developing a Test for Dagger Nematode Resistance

HICKE: Any other professors that you can talk about?

R.KUNDE: My lead professor was Dr. Lloyd Lider. I studied under him in grad school, and my project there was to develop better rootstocks. And so, at the time I developed a test with a nematode called *Xiphinema index*. It's called the dagger nematode.

This was proven to spread viruses in the vineyards, so that if you had an infected vine, it would feed on the vine and then move to another vine and infect that. These viruses would actually kill vineyards over a period of time, and then the ground would be worthless. The nematodes lived in the ground. It was shown that if you pulled out the roots, they could feed on old roots that were dead for up to 10 years.

So the reservoir was there. Then if you planted a new vineyard, they would just glom onto it. My project was to try to find first of all, a source of resistance, then start breeding grapevines. So I developed a test. I made a collection of all of Dr. Olmo's native varieties, a worldwide collection, and then I'd try to get them to root. Then I grew them in a greenhouse.

Then I put nematodes in each pot and waited about six months to see if they lived or died, what they did to the vines. I washed out the roots to see if they had increased. Of all the tests, there were only very few species that had some resistance to it. One was called *Vitis rufamentosa*.

HICKE: That's a variety of rootstock?

R.KUNDE: It's a native variety that grows in the southern United States. That's now been used in crosses that might be introduced shortly that will give resistance to rootstocks.¹

HICKE: Is this dagger nematode prevalent? Is there a lot of it around?

R.KUNDE: There's a lot of it in Napa County, BV Vineyards — I don't want to name names, but there's a lot of it around Rutherford; it's very common. The ground was worthless until now there are some rootstocks that they can use that weren't available then. They have not only resistance to the nematode but virus resistance too, so that even if they get the virus they don't show the symptoms.

¹ Reported in Kunde, R.M., L.A. Lider, and R.V. Schmitt, 1968. A test of *Vitis* resistance to *Xiphinema index*. Amer. Jour. Enol. Vitic., 19:30-36.

HICKE: This is all based on your research?

R.KUNDE: I developed the test to determine which vines had resistance — that was the project I worked on. I did make some of the initial crosses, but that takes years, 10 or 20 years, and I wasn't at Davis that long.

HICKE: Yes, but that was all based on the test you developed. Very impressive!

Reinventing Richard Kunde

HICKE: How about fellow students that you worked with? Or anything else about Davis that we should get on the record?

R.KUNDE: There's one thing that's kind of interesting: in high school I was involved in some clubs, but I was never around long enough, it seems like, because I was always going to San Francisco to the doctors. But when I was getting ready to go to Davis, I decided I had to change my ways — I did want to get involved in clubs and activities.

When I was growing up, I was referred to as Dick. I could change that when I went to Davis.

Since no one knew me there, I would introduce myself with my new name, which would be Rich. So every time somebody called me Rich, that would be a reinforcement that I was a new person and I was going to get involved in clubs and politics and what have you.

HICKE: You reinvented yourself.

R.KUNDE: That's right. And to this day, my family and friends in Kenwood still call me Dick, but new friends call me Rich, and it's very interesting to see the difference.

My claim to fame at Davis was I ran for men's area rep, which is a representative on the Student Council representing the men's dorms. I ran on the platform that I wanted to open up men's dorms to women on Sunday.

We had campaign parties, and we came home and painted signs that said, "Kunde wants women in men's dorms, but only on Sunday."

[laughter] Something like that. They were put at eye level where you lined up for food in all the cafeterias. And I won!

So way back when, Davis was the first campus of the University of California that allowed women in men's dorms. Of course, now it's all the time, but then it was kind of a radical deal.

HICKE: You have a lot of claims to fame!

R.KUNDE: And I almost lost, because a lot of the guys didn't want to clean up their rooms. But I think it actually helped the rooms.

HICKE: I'm sure. How did you get this idea? What motivated you?

R.KUNDE: I think because on Sundays sometimes your parents came, and my mother could never come up to where I lived on the third floor. I think that was it. It was more for parents than girlfriends. I thought, one day of the week — what was wrong with that?

I think it was from 2 p.m. to 4 p.m., something like that. I don't really remember.

Then I was elected in my senior year as president of the class.

CALIFORNIA NORTH COAST GRAPE GROWERS ASSOC.

HIRING ON

HICKE: So you got a master's degree. In viticulture or horticulture?

R.KUNDE: It was in horticulture. At that time you couldn't get a degree in viticulture.

HICKE: Then what did you do?

R.KUNDE: I came home and worked on the family farm with my brothers. I also did some consulting on the side. My brother Fred was on the board of the California North Coast Grape Growers Association, which just dissolved this year. He said that there was going to be a position open for a field representative that would require that you travel around Napa, Sonoma, Mendocino counties — it was three counties at that time — and try to get members.

So I applied for the position, and in my presentation, I talked about appellations. I asked the board of directors: why do you call yourself the North Coast? What does that mean? I talked about appellations in Europe and what they've done. I said that we need rules and regulations to cover our wine labels in the United States.

I guess I must have hit on some nerves. There was a bunch of people applying, and we all sat outside, and then they called me back in. One of the directors said — I'll never forget this — he said, "We don't quite understand what you were talking about. Why were you talking about the Appalachian mountains back East?" [laughter]

Honest to goodness, that question will stay in my memory forever. I was appalled. I thought I'd done such an excellent job, but I guess it didn't sink in at all!

HICKE: There weren't any appellations in this area at all?

R.KUNDE: No. My idea was that I was asking them: what was the North Coast? They referred to themselves as the North Coast, but was the North Coast Napa, Sonoma, Mendocino counties? That was the organization. Or did it extend to Lodi? Or did Northern California go all the way down to Bakersfield? Where was the North Coast? That was the question I was asking.

HICKE: Did you get the job?

R.KUNDE: I got the job!

HICKE: In spite of everything!

RESPONSIBILITIES

R.KUNDE: My job was, again, to try to gain memberships. My job was also to raise money, so I came up with the idea of a viticulture show, which is a trade show, in connection with the annual meeting. We made I think \$30,000 or \$40,000 a year just off the show. We put on an art show and all kinds of other things in connection with the viticulture show, and that was a big hit.

In the meantime, when I first got the job, I went around to Napa, Sonoma, and Mendocino counties to introduce myself to all the farm advisers and the ag commissioners and those people in the industry that I thought I'd be working with. I wanted to get to know them, and I also talked to them about my ideas of where the industry should be going and how we should protect ourselves and create appellations.

One of the persons that I talked with was Leon Adams. I remember I talked to him about my idea of creating rules and regulations, and he outlined everything I should do. But I'll never forget this: he said, "Whatever you do, don't talk to the vintners about this. Keep it within the growers association."

CHANGING THE INDUSTRY: BATF RULES

Creation of American Viticultural Areas

R.KUNDE: So I got to work. I introduced myself to the local BATF [Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco and Firearms] representatives. It was George Neese, Bruno Desideri and David Lose initially. George Neese has now passed away. They helped me develop a letter that I worked on for quite a few months.

I can't find the letter. Everything was at Sonoma Grapevines. Then when we sold and moved, I can't find it. It was a fabulous letter that probably ought to be saved. Maybe I'll try to find it. I don't know where it might be. The office is gone too, so I don't know if they have it. But it would be for the archives.

It was a 10- or 15- or 20-page letter. It explained wine labels and I included sample wine labels, and it asked for the creation of American appellations. Of course, it started with my asking for the North Coast to be legally defined as Napa, Sonoma, Mendocino counties.

HICKE: It was the first in the United States?

R.KUNDE: Yes, In other words, we developed the rules and regulations for all appellations. I didn't sign it; Charlie Barra was the president. I was just the gofer. I did everything — I ran the office, did the viticulture show, did all the newsletters and press releases. I was a one-man show, but everyone else got the credit for it.

Changing Varietal Labeling

R.KUNDE: But I've always been proud of this letter, because in the letter, not only did it ask for the creation of American Viticultural Areas, but it also asked for the change of the grape content in wine. It was then 51 percent and we wanted it to be 75 percent, and we got it!

HICKE:: Before a wine could be labeled a varietal, it had to be 75 percent one grape variety.

Defining Wine Label Terms

HICKE: That was new then too?

R.KUNDE: We did that too, all in the same letter. We addressed other things in the letter about — when it says “mountains” or anything on the label, what does it mean? We wanted the BATF to define everything that appeared on a wine label, so that if it was a region, we wanted them to draw lines around the region to protect names.

Again, I remember Leon Adams said, “You don’t talk to anyone about this; you just do it.”

I think it was in 1974 that we got a letter from the BATF — and that’s another letter that should be saved — where they said that they would define the North Coast as Napa, Sonoma, and Mendocino counties. So that was the first appellation.

HICKE: Surely the BATF would have that on file, wouldn’t they?

R.KUNDE: You would think so. They should have both letters.

HICKE: I’ll check their website; maybe they’ll have something there. [Note: nothing was found on the website.]

R.KUNDE: I was hired in 1970, so that was about a four-year process. In that process, in getting all this created, there was no public hearing or anything else.

HICKE: I was thinking about that possibility.

R.KUNDE: Nothing. It was absolutely amazing. Then once the BATF did that, then the Wine Institute came unglued. They said that you have to have hearings and you have to change this and do that. They did not want it.

HICKE: They were against it?

R.KUNDE: Absolutely. Then I could see why Leon Adams told me what to do. It was absolutely amazing.

HICKE: Why didn't the vintners think this was a good idea?

R.KUNDE: I don't know; you'd probably have to ask the vintners. But basically, it was creating a lot more rules and regulations. They would have to keep track of their wines to prove that the grapes did actually come from one area to another area.

HICKE: Did they object to appellations?

R.KUNDE: Oh, yes, they didn't want that. They wanted "California" period. They certainly didn't want to go from 51 percent to 75 percent. You could use more of the cheaper grapes, like Thompson Seedless. We got that changed. And that was going to change the industry forever.

Benefits of Published Prices

R.KUNDE: I can remember in the early '70s, I was standing in a vineyard — I can't remember the grower's name, but Napa was always the worst place to try to gain members. They wanted to be by themselves, and they didn't even have an association then.

A lot of growers at that time grew Napa Gamay — that's what it was referred to at that time. That is a very large variety with big berries, huge clusters, huge amount of juice, but you could sell it as Gamay Beaujolais.

HICKE: But it's not the same grape, is it?

R.KUNDE: Well, Gamay Beaujolais is basically Pinot Noir. You can make Gamay Beaujolais wine out of Napa Gamay. You could also make Gamay Beaujolais wine out of Pinot Noir. Well, Pinot Noir is, in a good year, about four tons to the acre. With the Gamay, you could get 10 tons to the acre. So what are you going to put into it? It's not the greatest of grapes.

Part of my position at the California North Coast Grape Growers was involved with pricing. Of course, I was always out trying to find grape prices, make sure that they were published, so that if there was a higher price, people would find out about it and that would benefit the growers. I was working for the growers.

HICKE: So if Napa growers were getting more than the Sonoma growers, you'd let the Sonoma growers know.

R.KUNDE: Yes. I would get it all submitted to a publication that used to be called the "Federal/State Market News Service" that published all the prices on a weekly basis. I'd make sure that we'd get prices in that publication.

At that time, if you grew Napa Gamay and sold it as Napa Gamay, you would get about three hundred, tops four hundred dollars a ton. But if you sold it as Gamay Beaujolais — and the only difference is that when you cross the scale when the grapes are coming into the winery, you put down Napa Gamay or you put down Gamay Beaujolais. If you put down Gamay Beaujolais, it's seven hundred dollars a ton. It is crazy!

I started looking into this, and I found out that there was a regulation within the BATF that allowed Gamay Beaujolais to be made from Pinot Noir or Napa Gamay — two greatly different varieties. And guess who wrote the regulation for the BATF? The Wine Institute!

You can't believe the number of members that I gained over in Napa because I searched out all the people who grew Napa Gamay and went to them and said, "Listen. If you sell your grapes as Gamay Beaujolais, you'll get a lot more money."

They wouldn't believe me, and then they looked into it, and sure enough. [Robert] Mondavi would pay the seven hundred dollars for Gamay Beaujolais, because at that time, it was a big selling item. You know, things change.

So that was a hot deal, so then they would start selling their grapes as Gamay Beaujolais, and they made three hundred dollars more a ton. I got a membership out of it, so I was very happy.

HICKE: Didn't anybody care that the varieties were different?

R.KUNDE: I guess the vintners didn't, at that time. You also have to remember that a varietal could be almost 50 percent Thompson Seedless. It's all changed now. This was before all the rules and regulations went into effect.

HICKE: Yes, before your grand letter.

R.KUNDE: Right. Another time I can remember: Gewürztraminer — I still love Gewürztraminer — was considered not a very good grape, not a very good wine.

HICKE: It used to be made sweet.

R.KUNDE: Right. But I found a grower who was selling it for seven hundred dollars a ton when the going price was three fifty. I got the contract published; everyone got seven hundred dollars. I got a lot more memberships.

HICKE: And friends, too!

R.KUNDE: I did a lot of that with the North Coast Grape Growers. The thing was we basically turned the industry around, with changing the varietal content and developing the appellation rules and regulations for all the regions in the United States.

HICKE: Do you remember who was heading the Wine Institute at that time?

R.KUNDE: John DeLuca.

Wildwood Consulting

HICKE: What exactly was Wildwood Consulting?

R.KUNDE: It was me. It was Wildwood Consulting that worked for the North Coast Grape Growers. It was just a name.

HICKE: I see. Rather than being employed for the association, you were consulting for them.

R.KUNDE: Yes.

HICKE: Have we mostly covered your work with the California North Coast Grape Growers?

R.KUNDE: I think so. It was a very enjoyable position.

HICKE: You worked with them from 1970 to 1976.

R.KUNDE: Yes.

PROTECTING THE AMERICAN MARKET FOR ZINFANDEL

R.KUNDE: When I was working with the California North Coast Grape Growers, I wrote an editorial for the Grape Grower magazine saying that California needed a growers' organization. Then California Grape Growers got started. I was named as their representative to the Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco, and Firearms. I worked with such things as protecting the name of Zinfandel.

At that time they formed a committee where they were reviewing varietal names and if they were grown in the U.S. It was an outgrowth of the letter from the North Coast Grape Growers Association. I had these contacts with the BATF, so the California group named me on the committee to represent them on the varietal naming committee for the BATF.

They were to review all the varieties that were grown in the United States and what would be the appropriate name on the label. They wanted to make sure that all the varietals were correctly named. Dr. Olmo was on the committee. I learned so much from going back to Washington all the time — it was fabulous.

HICKE: Whom did you have to deal with in Washington? The BATF?

R.KUNDE: The BATF. I think at that time the secretary's name was Black. One of the interesting things was that one day I got a phone call from Dr. Austin Goheen. He worked in the viticulture department. He was actually an employee of the USDA [US Department of Agriculture] and he was the one who did much of the virus work.

He called me up and said, "I've got some Italians who would like to tour your nursery at Sonoma Grapevines. Could you invite us over and set up lunch? And by the way, they like late-harvest Zinfandel, strong in alcohol."

So I called Traverso's and I asked Bill Traverso to put together a case of high-alcohol late Zinfandels that I could pick up. We went to — I think it was called the Hilltopper Restaurant at the time; it's the Villa Restaurant now, on a hill overlooking Montgomery Village. I think

there were twelve or so. Jim Pratt was vice president of Sonoma Grapevines, and he went everywhere that I went, so he was there.

I didn't see the bottles that were in the case, we just started pulling out all these Zinfandels, and lo and behold, I pulled out a bottle that was an Italian Zinfandel, imported from Italy. I almost dropped the bottle, because, first of all, Zinfandel is unique to California. At that time there wasn't five acres planted anywhere in the world other than California. It was all in California, but here's an Italian Zinfandel.

Here's a variety that wasn't documented by the BATF. The BATF allowed it to be imported as Zinfandel, and this was exactly what I have been working against for years.

When I pulled out the bottle, there was this gentleman at the end of the table that stood up and just started yelling. I didn't know what I had done, but it turned out, he was the president of the company. He was ecstatic that I had brought it for him. I didn't know it was in the case.

The next week I went back to Traverso's and picked up a bottle, put it into a brown paper bag and took it to Washington, D.C. When our committee meeting opened up, I brought out the bottle, and I said, "Could you explain why the BATF allowed a wine to be called Zinfandel when all the grapes are grown in California and nowhere else, and here's this wine from Italy, and they don't have any acreage?" There was just dead silence.

The director said, "Let me take this under direction and we'll get back to you." So we had the meeting and we broke for lunch, and he came back in. I'll never forget this. He said, "Well, we've looked into this, and they don't grow Zinfandel, so it was a mistake on our part. What would you want us to do? Do you want us to issue an order to recall every Italian Zinfandel that's in the United States now, or to allow the inventory to be depleted and not import any more? It's up to you, Mr. Kunde."

I said, "I think it would be all right if you just depleted the inventory." So that's the story about Zinfandel.

HICKE: Where did they get the Zinfandel grapes? Or were they Primitivo or something else?

R.KUNDE: We didn't even know if they were Primitivo. I knew about Primitivo at the time, because Dr. Goheen had gone, but he had put in a row of Primitivo and a row of Zinfandel, side by side, at Davis. Then I did the same thing at our home ranch in Glen Ellen, and there was night and day difference between the two. There was night and day difference between the two in Glen Ellen but not at Davis.

At Davis they looked identical, but in Glen Ellen the environment was different, and I think the set was different. The Primitivo looked like what the best hillside Zinfandel you'd ever see should look like.

It was amazing. I'm sure it was because of the colder temperatures during set. Primitivo never set as well in Glen Ellen as it did over at Davis.

Anyway, we had no idea if it was Primitivo or some other red grape or whatever, but it was a very hot commodity. At the same time that they changed the rules and regulations, that was just prior to when White Zinfandel became a craze on the market. Just like Gamay Beaujolais became a craze at one time, White Zinfandel was the hot thing.

Italy was all prepared to start bringing in White Zinfandel. It would have just taken away our market, or could have. But that was all stopped.

HICKE: I imagine Sutter Home winery was grateful!

R.KUNDE: Oh, yes. But then I think another company from New York started bringing in Zinfandel from Brazil, of all places. Brazil! So the California Grape Growers sent down Dr. Olmo to look at this. It was comical to listen to Dr. Olmo come back from this tour and say, "Yes, we were supposed to go to all these vineyards that were verified to be Zinfandel, and oh, the bridge was out, the gate was locked and we couldn't get in....." There was just a multitude of excuses.

HICKE: No doubt the vineyards were flooded! [laughter]

R.KUNDE: Exactly. He was not allowed to go into one vineyard.

HICKE: Oh, that's funny.

R.KUNDE: But they didn't have any. Again, it was amazing.

SONOMA GRAPEVINES, INC.

FOUNDING OF THE COMPANY

HICKE: Now we want to go to Sonoma Grapevines, where you started working on April Fool's Day in 1976. Who actually founded Sonoma Grapevines?

R.KUNDE: Dr. Dennison Morey. I ran into him through the California North Coast Grape Growers Association. I was trying to get him to become a member in the association. I think when I met him it sparked my interest from way back when I'd always wanted to own a nursery.

This was my chance, when Sonoma Grapevines was starting. I wrote Dr. Morey a letter saying that in the future if you were ever interested, I would be interested in becoming an investor or whatever with your nursery. I got a phone call.

HICKE: I have that they were founded in 1972. What were they doing?

R.KUNDE: They were founded just to graft grapevines. I think I got a letter saying that I could invest in the company and become a director. I took that to the board of directors of the California North Coast Grape Growers and asked them if I could do this, because I thought there could be a potential conflict of interest.

They said I could invest in the nursery, but I could not tell anyone, and I could not go out on the road and recommend the nursery to anyone, because I was trying to gain members.

HICKE: You were representing the members.

R.KUNDE: Right, right. So that's what I did.

FOLIAGE SALES REPRESENTATIVE

HICKE: In '76 you were foliage sales representative.

R.KUNDE: I resigned from my position with California North Coast Grape Growers, because at the time Sonoma Grapevines was going bankrupt. They'd had numerous crop failures and what have you, and I didn't want my name connected with a company that had gone bankrupt.

So I decided that I needed to spend more time there. In order to gain more cash flow, I told the board of directors that we needed to do something besides grapevines. Grapevines was something you did in the spring and then you were out of the business. So I said we needed something to grow all year round.

So we did foliage. We did Wandering Jews; we did a lot of house plants.

HICKE: I see — foliage is growing plants, not grafting.

R.KUNDE: Right. That kept us going a little bit. I gradually started buying out the other directors, and before I got married in 1982, I bought out the last director and I owned Sonoma Grapevines free and clear.

But in the meantime, Sonoma Grapevines had started growing things like Poinsettias and Easter Lilies and all kinds of things to keep people employed all year round.

HICKE: You started this.

R.KUNDE: Yes, but I didn't start Sonoma Grapevines.

HICKE: Well, you started the foliage business and you turned the company around and went into other things besides the grafting.

R.KUNDE: I remember when I first took over Sonoma Grapevines, I called in people from the Small Business Administration. They will come into your business and advise you. I remember I got them to come and they looked over the books. They shook their heads and said, "The best thing for you to do is to go bankrupt."

I'll never forget that. They never gave me any advice but to go bankrupt.

HICKE: Oh, no! Well, that was quite a mistake on their part.

R.KUNDE: I didn't take their advice!

HICKE: I read that you drove all over selling these plants.

R.KUNDE: I did. All week long. I had a route. I'd go into the Bay Area, and I'd go into the Sacramento area, I'd go into Longs Drugstores and nurseries and hawk my Wandering Jew or whatever.

HICKE: Where did the plants come from? Did you start them from scratch?

R.KUNDE: Oh, yes, we grew them.

HICKE: So it took a while to get that started.

R.KUNDE: They grow quite rapidly. So anyway, that was combining my two loves in life of gardening and also being in the vineyards. It was an unbelievable position that I landed in, and I thoroughly enjoyed it.

GRAFTING AND ROOTSTOCKS

HICKE: Did you do any of the grafting yourself? Did you teach people how to do it?

R.KUNDE: We taught a lot of people. I may have grafted a few. I did field budding a lot when I worked with my brothers in the vineyard. I did grafting when I was at university.

HICKE: Sure. You probably had some employees in place when you took over.

R.KUNDE: Oh, yes.

HICKE: And did you have anyone who knew how to grow the plants, or did you have to teach them that too?

R.KUNDE: Well, we hired growers and what have you, and I always worked with a lot of people.

HICKE: Does anyone in particular come to mind?

R.KUNDE: One person is Dr. Curtis Alley. He was on the board of directors of Sonoma Grapevines, and he was a professor at Davis. He has passed away. He gave us a lot of help. There are a lot of people in the industry who helped.

HICKE: Can you give me an idea of what your daily routine would be with Sonoma Grapevines? Of course, it changed over the years.

R.KUNDE: I worked in the office a lot, and I was on the phone talking to customers the majority of the time. If not that, I was going to meetings. It seemed like I was always going to some meeting somewhere at some time for something, whether it be at UC Davis or one of the various things I belonged to.

It was extremely important to keep my name out there and the name of Sonoma Grapevines and the fact that I was trying to help the industry besides supplying the industry.

HICKE: Did you have a marketing person or were you the marketing person?

R.KUNDE: I think I was the marketing person.

HICKE: I'd like to ask: what were the preferred rootstocks?

R.KUNDE: We grew virtually every rootstock that was available from the foundation plant service that was available at Davis.

HICKE: How many was that?

R.KUNDE: Unlike other nurseries where there were two or three, we would offer everything. I wanted to offer every variety, every clone of every variety, and have everything available that you just could not find at another nursery. In other words, where else could you go to get Christmas?

HICKE: Did you have St. George and the usual rootstocks?

R.KUNDE: Oh, yes. We were doing a lot of grafting for people on the East Coast and in Canada, and of course they did not use A X R 1 when A X R 1 was the only rootstock to use in California.

HICKE: Why didn't they?

R.KUNDE: Because that was completely susceptible to phylloxera back East.

HICKE: But I thought that wasn't known then?

R.KUNDE: It was known back East that it was completely susceptible and it wouldn't grow there. So in order to get the business, we had to use other rootstocks, like 5C and SO4. Then 3309 is a really popular one for back East. We couldn't sell it in California, but we had them available and I planted a mother block so that we could develop markets throughout the United States.

When there was the demise of A X R 1, we were probably in a good position, because we were one of the few nurseries that had all these mother blocks of other rootstocks, because we were grafting them when no one else was. This paper points out when we grafted a million vines and when we planted five million, and I think we were up to eleven or twelve million at one time.

HICKE: [reading from the paper] By 1990 you had done five million, by 1997 it was eleven million.

R.KUNDE: I think at that time we had over 800 employees, between the nursery in Santa Rosa as well as in Madera and in Fresno counties. We grew Sonoma Grapevines into the largest vine-grafting nursery in America.

HICKE: Did you keep acquiring land for the nurseries?

R.KUNDE: Yes, we bought land in Fresno and Madera counties.

HICKE: And you had a certain amount of land around here that Sonoma Grapevines already had.

R.KUNDE: Basically everything that I made at the nursery we pumped back into the company to buy more land or vineyards, more increase blocks.

HICKE: Did you have some procedures for quality control? That must have been pretty crucial.

R.KUNDE: We were I believe the first nursery that could document where everything came from, right down to the row. This was for disease

purposes; in case something was found from the increase block, the following year you could go back and find out exactly where that came from. I remember the Foundation Material Service people came out to our nursery, and I was showing them what we did to document how everything should be done, and they weren't doing it. They changed their ways to make sure they could document where every single planting came from, from every single vine.

To this day, every vine that is in Saralee's Vineyard, we can document where it came from, both in terms of rootstock and in terms of scion wood. There are very few vineyards that do that. They might be able to tell you what rootstock; most of them can't. Maybe it's Cabernet, but what clone and where did it come from?

We're still getting phone calls from old customers of Sonoma Grapevines. "You sold this to so-and-so, and I bought the property, but the seller can't remember what clone it was."

HICKE: And you have that?

R.KUNDE: We have most of it. Now it's getting pretty old, but I think we can still find most of it.

HICKE: Do you have it on computers?

R.KUNDE: Yes. Every year we'd always give out caps — that's the common thing, for a company to give out caps. Every year we'd have a different theme. I remember one year I designed a hat — it was not a very popular hat; it was like a clown hat. It said, "Cloning around in 1998" or whatever year, instead of "clowning around."

We were the first nursery to start talking about clones. I'd give talks all over the place. I was on the Foundation Materials Advisory Committee and would go to Davis all the time. I helped teach courses at Davis. As we developed this vineyard here, I used all the clones. So it wasn't just a number to me. I could talk to you about the difference between Pinot Noir 23 and Pinot Noir and 18 and what have you.

HICKE: Did you have some of those dagger nematode resistant rootstocks?

R.KUNDE: Oh, yes. We used a lot of rootstocks just because I want to see how they'd grow.

HICKE: Did people buy those?

R.KUNDE: Yes. We probably had the largest planting of O39-16, which was the rootstock for the Xiphinema nematode. It's still used today. There is going to be a new generation coming out; it's already in testing and it's coming out soon, and will probably replace the other. There might be some *Rufamentosa* in some of those.

HICKE: I read that there was some kind of false alarm about a disease in 1995 that turned out to be not true. [pause] That doesn't ring a bell?

R.KUNDE: The industry has gone through scares continually, so just offhand, I can't think of what that false alarm was.

HICKE: How do you judge what the demand will be for the future? How do you know what to plant?

R.KUNDE: That was another thing about Sonoma Grapevines: I tried to position it so that we would have vines available when you wanted them. The common deal is that you would call up and I would say, "OK, I could graft some for you next spring and you'll have to wait until the following year to get them, so you'll have to wait a couple of years before you could even put in a vineyard."

HICKE: That makes it pretty difficult for the client.

R.KUNDE: Yes. I wanted to change that around and have material available. It was kind of like going to Reno — I did my own gambling every year. [laughter] By going to all the various trade seminars and reading the magazines and keeping up on things, you kind of got a feeling on what's going to be hot or what's hot in the industry.

HICKE: That means you have to look at the wines, right?

R.KUNDE: Exactly. I would try to figure out what I could probably sell the next year, and then we grafted it a lot. I remember one year, I think it was in the early '90s, when we grafted over a million vines, and I don't think I had orders for a thousand vines for the following year. We went through so many ups and downs. It was one of the years when no one wanted any vines; you could give away any vines. Yet I knew the following spring I would be able to sell some vines. So we just went ahead and grafted.

HICKE: What happened?

R.KUNDE: Well, we made it through! We sold vines the next year. If I hadn't had them, maybe they would have gone to another nursery.

HICKE: What happens to unsold grafted rootstocks? Will they keep for another year?

R.KUNDE: You can replant them in the nursery for another year, but we managed to sell everything.

HICKE: Did that involve a lot of running around on your part to find buyers?

R.KUNDE: Oh, yes. We would always have meetings at the nursery to try to figure out what we were going to graft for the following year. It wasn't a haphazard deal. I would get up a plan every year so we knew what we would be grafting for the year ahead of time.

HICKE: Are there any particular winegrowers that you have sold to that come to mind?

R.KUNDE: Well, there's Mondavi. When August Sebastiani was alive, I loved to deal with August Sebastiani. Rod Strong. Mirassou. Martini. I go back way before Gallo bought Mirassou and Martini, and I knew all the principals. I'm sure part of this was because I was involved with all of these organizations so that I got to meet all these famous people.

HICKE: I would say they were probably happy to meet you! This note says you stopped importation of Italian Primitivo. That's what you talked about before, isn't it?

R.KUNDE: Right, the Zinfandel.

BLACK GOO

HICKE: Now, you had a lawsuit in the year 2000. What was that about?

R.KUNDE: I'm sure we've had lawsuits all through, just like any other deal. I think there was one about that time in which the big hot deal was black goo, a disease called black goo. It can actually devitalize a vineyard, and the vines could die over a period of 10 years or so.

HICKE: Is it a virus or bacteria?

R.KUNDE: It's a bacteria that was — how can I best describe this? It's apparently a disease that has been in vineyards forever. But it was just identified in the late '90s, where they actually could develop a test for it.

I remember I was scheduled to give a talk on Italian grape varieties. The day before I was to give this talk, a consultant came into the nursery and said, "Your nursery is completely infected with this disease. They're in the vines; they're in the cuttings," and we were grafting at the time.

This just took my livelihood away overnight. The vines looked no different that year than any other year, and I just couldn't believe what the consultant was saying.

Anyway, the consultant didn't know what he was talking about. It's the same thing as if there was a disease killing people, and they don't know what it is, and all of a sudden, they discover it's cancer. It's kind of like this. But that's a far exaggeration, because although they had just discovered it, it was always there. We've lived with it forever.

At that time the industry was expanding rapidly. There were a lot of absentee owners. There were differences of opinion on how to establish a vineyard. The way a vineyard should be established is you water it extensively and fertilize it. Then once it gets established you take away all of that to develop quality. But first of all, you have to develop a quality vine, and you do that with water and fertilization.

There were some growers that would not treat the young vines properly, wouldn't water them, wouldn't fertilize them, and this disease manifested itself greatly. So the nursery got the blame.

As I said, I was scheduled to give this talk on Italian varieties, and I went up to the organizer, and I said, "Do you mind if I change the whole subject?" I went completely public. I said what had happened the day before at the nursery. I said I did not want this to be part of the rumor mill. I didn't know how to react except to make it public so that everyone knew, but I think in the long run that whole thing backfired and we got the blame for everything because we talked about it out in the open when other nurseries would not say a word.

I think people believed we were the source for this disease, when actually every nursery has it. It's kind of funny — we sell all of our increase block cuttings to all of the nurseries, so if we were the ones that had it, they had it.

The University of California had it because that is where we originally got the source cuttings. It was everywhere; it's still everywhere.

HICKE: It doesn't damage the vines or the grapes?

R.KUNDE: It will damage the vines if you don't care for them properly initially when the vineyards are planted. There were, as I said, owners that weren't involved in the industry, that were just getting involved in the industry. They would make mistakes, and of course, the nursery got the blame for it.

I certainly don't like lawsuits. That's my version of it. To this day, every person that said they had the disease and their vineyard would die — their vines are still growing.

You said there was some mysterious disease rumored about in '95 — it's the same thing. Every year there's something new in the industry that we're all scared about. It keeps life interesting.

HICKE: Well, that's one way to look at it!

R.KUNDE: That one threw me for a loop, and I thought I was handling it correctly, and I'm not sure if I did or I didn't. This vineyard that you're looking at [points out the window] was basically established from rejected vines. With every customer we always say you can bring back any vine for a refund. So we've planted the rejected vines like you can't believe.

I could never understand why the customers always got the best vines, we got the worst vines, and we have a beautiful vineyard. [laughter]

Ask my wife! She always complained that she would get all the hand-me-downs [for her vineyard].

SARALEE'S VINEYARDS

HICKE: Well, speaking of the vineyard, you sold Sonoma Grapevines and started the vineyards. Tell me how that went.

R.KUNDE: I started the vineyards with Saralee when we got married.

HICKE: Let's see; that was —

R.KUNDE: It was '82. We bought the vineyard in — you need to talk to Saralee about the vineyard. She's the manager of the vineyard. We put in the vineyard, and I was trying to sell grapevines and then I was also trying to sell grapes.

I would get a vintner on the phone and I would start talking about Chardonnay, and he would say, "What do you mean about the Chardonnay grapes I bought from you?"

And I would say, "I'm not talking about the grapes; I'm talking about whether you need any vines." It just became a conflict of interest. So I said, "Saralee, why don't you become the manager of the vineyard, and you sell the grapes? I can't do that and sell grapevines, because it's a conflict of interest for me."

After that, she took that over, and it was one less headache for me. I didn't have to worry about selling the fruit.

HICKE: So this was in the '80s that this happened.

R.KUNDE: Yes.

MORE ON SONOMA GRAPEVINES

Technology and Change

HICKE: Continuing with Sonoma Grapevines for a while, did you change the technology, the equipment?

R.KUNDE: We changed all kinds of things. There used to be something called a cleft graft. We used to staple the grafts together at one time. We changed many times over till finally it was a saw that fit everything together. We didn't need rubber bands; we didn't need staples.

I figured out that with this one particular graft, if you made the proper fit the first time, you didn't need all these other things to help keep the graft together. It would do it all on its own.

So we changed our grafting technique and numerous other techniques continually, while we were in business. We changed a lot. I think at Davis I was always taught that you shouldn't be afraid of a change. So we definitely didn't do the same thing year after year. We always changed — grew new things, changed what was selling at the time, introduced new clones.

I think we were an innovator of the industry.

HICKE: Did you work with people at Davis quite a lot?

R.KUNDE: I almost lived at Davis; I was there a lot.

HICKE: What exactly were you doing there?

R.KUNDE: I was in advisory meetings; I went to seminars, helped with courses. I was doing a little bit of everything.

HICKE: Were you also getting ideas, new clones, that sort of thing?

R.KUNDE: Oh, sure, sure. Walking their increase blocks, looking at the differences that were there. Oh, yes. I was always getting new ideas.

HICKE: Was there anybody that you worked with quite a lot?

R.KUNDE: I mentioned Dr. Olmo, Dr. Lloyd Lider, Dr. Andy Walker, Dr. Austin Goheen, Carol Meredith — just basically everyone who was there.

HICKE: Can you tell me about your most important employees?

R.KUNDE: I mentioned Jim Pratt. He was actually the best man at our wedding. He is a great friend as well as colleague, and he helped the nursery grow tremendously, a very dedicated person. He now has his own

management company and does planting and care for other vineyards.

Maybe I could get a list together.

HICKE: Well, I'm mainly interested in the ones you remember the most, which is obviously Mr. Pratt.

SELLING SONOMA GRAPEVINES

HICKE: OK, tell me about selling Sonoma Grapevines.

R.KUNDE: It was a major decision in my life. It was at a time when my health was not very good. I had a slight stroke, and to be honest, I didn't think I was going to be on this earth much longer, and I thought that I'd better get everything in order.

I knew the industry was headed for another downturn. We had expanded greatly, and I knew I would have to lay off people and sell property. One day I got a phone call from a former employee, who said, "I hear you might want to sell the nursery."

I think I said no; I don't know what I said. It really shook me up. I came home and talked to Saralee, and she said that maybe now was a good time.

HICKE: Was the caller from Vintage Nurseries?

R.KUNDE: Yes, it was the two Sanders brothers. Initially they only wanted the home facility of Sonoma Grapevines in Santa Rosa at Dennis Lane. It was 9.9 acres. Then that changed in the negotiations to where they would buy the increase blocks in Fresno County but not the growing grounds in Madera County.

They bought that. We sold the growing grounds in Madera to, I think, an almond grower, and we sold the new facility of Sonoma Grapevines at Fulton, The Farmery, to Mondavi. So it was big enough that we sold to more than one person.

At the time, it was an earth-shaking deal, but now that it's over with, I wish I had done it sooner. Health-wise, I had my stomach worked on, so I lost about 250 pounds, so now everything's fine.

At the point where we decided to sell Sonoma Grapevines, I could not walk. I was on a walker a lot with a cane. I was just so large I couldn't move, I couldn't breathe. I had all kinds of problems. So that's why I thought I'd better get my business in order, and one way to fix that was to sell it. The opportunity presented itself, and we went on to sell every part of it.

PROFESSIONAL ACTIVITIES AND HONORS

Horticulture

HICKE: You said you love what you are doing now. What exactly are you doing now?

R.KUNDE: I'm doing what I've always done — planting plants! A gardener is never satisfied with whatever you are doing. We're the weirdest grape-growing people; no other vineyard plants trees or other things in the middle of the vineyard.

I didn't want this tree taken out; I didn't want that tree taken out. "Oh, you've got to take them all out." I would fight, and we preserved a lot of trees way before it was fashionable to save trees.

Founding Sonoma County Grape Growers

HICKE: Good for you! I don't want to keep you too much longer, but could you just pick out a few items from this list of achievements to talk about?

R.KUNDE: In 1984 — I think I started talking about it, but got off the track. Actually we were at this same restaurant where the Italians were when we talked about Primitivo. I don't remember what the meeting was about, but I remember afterwards going into the bar with Rich Thomas and saying, "Do you know what the problem is in Sonoma County? There is no organization representing Sonoma County grape growers."

So on a cocktail napkin, we started writing down potential members that we should contact. Lo and behold, we founded the Sonoma County Grape Growers, and I was elected the first president.

Other Activities and Awards

R.KUNDE: [looking at list] We talked about Zinfandel. I became a [Master] Knight of the Vine.

HICKE: That's pretty impressive.

R.KUNDE: Oh, I don't know. It's more impressive to look at than anything else. I guess Davis thought I was doing something good, so I got a citation there. [In 1988 awarded California Aggie Alumni Citation for Excellence.]

We talked about the millions of vines.

We were awarded the Sonoma County Harvest Fair "Friend of Sonoma County Agriculture" in 1991. I've always been interested in Zinfandel, and the California legislature has tried to get Zinfandel as uniquely California. I went to the Zinfandel Advocates & Producers and presented to them that we should campaign, that Zinfandel is a National Heritage variety and started that whole deal.

We had the largest registered increase grapevine materials planting of any nursery, and this is where we got all the different clones. We had over 400 acres.

From the Sonoma County Grape Growers we got the Award of Excellence, and I'm on the Santa Rosa Junior College Agricultural Advisory Committee, and in 2005 they decided to honor Saralee and I with their extravaganza, and they dedicated the Warren G. Dutton building at the Shone Farm. The interior of the building is a huge auditorium/show ring that can seat 2,000 people, and they named it the Rich and Saralee Kunde Arena. That's probably the most recent thing.

HICKE: What about this list of memberships? What stands out?

R.KUNDE: The California Association of Winegrape Growers — that was who I represented on the BATF varietal naming committee that I talked about. That's the only one that really stands out.

HICKE: And the list of volunteer service?

R.KUNDE: We never talked about the California Rootstock Commission. Going to Davis all the time and knowing how much money they needed for research, I decided to raise money for specific rootstock research. So I went around to all the nurserymen and got their support to form a commission, where we would assess every rootstock cutting and develop funds for research. I got the commission founded and was a director of that, and that's still going today.

There's also the California Tree Fruit & Grapevine Improvement Committee, and that's a similar organization which raises research money for fruit trees and not just rootstock but for whole grapevines.

[reviewing the list] We talked about Sonoma County Grape Growers, we talked about BATF. There's the National Grape Germplasm Committee that again is to develop sites for retaining the germplasm for *Vitis*, and I was an advisor there.

I was a Sonoma County Harvest Fair director and president. I'm sure that's not all of them, but that's all I can think of at the moment. So that's about it.

HICKE: I'm sure that's not nearly all of it, but at least we've got some of it covered, and I'd like to thank you very much for spending the time on this project. You've had a very impressive career.

R.KUNDE: We didn't talk at all about the vineyard; that's Saralee's project.

HICKE: I'm going to ask her about that, since you said it's hers to manage.

R.KUNDE: I'm very proud of what she's done. She sells to so many different wineries, it's unbelievable. We had so many different varieties and so many different clones that it's kind of unique for a vineyard of our size. She's managed to find vintners that like this clone or that clone or this variety.

HICKE: Good. I'll certainly ask her to talk about the vineyard. Thanks very much, Rich.

R.KUNDE: Thank you.

APPENDICES

Saralee Kunde: *curriculum vitae*

Richard Kunde: *curriculum vitae*

2006 Vintage Buyers

Agstravaganza Honoring Rich and Saralee Kunde

INDEX – Saralee and Richard Kunde

Adams, Leon, 71, 73
Ag Trust, 50
Alley, Curtis, 83
American Viticultural Areas, 19-20, 25, 70-72
Arrowood, Richard, 30-33

Barra, Charlie, 72
Bergland, Rod, 51
black goo, 87-89
Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco and Firearms, 72-79

California Grape Growers Assoc., 77
California North Coast Grape Growers Assoc., 70-79
California Rootstock Commission, 96
Call, Florence, 22
Carrillo, Joan, 21
Catie's Corner, 24, 39
Christmas grape variety, 66

daffodil planting, 54-56
Dagger nematode, 67-68, 85-86
De Loach Winery, 30, 33
Desideri, Bruno, 72
Diggs, Leonard, 46
Dorfman, Steve, 15
Down, Loni, 44
Dutton, Gail, 50
Dutton, Warren, 35, 49-50, 51

fish friendly farming, 36
Foppiano, Lou Jr., 22
Fry, Nick, 52

gingerbread party, 10-11, 42
Goheen, Austin, 77, 79
grapes,
 harvest of, 28-29
 planting of, 25-28, 34-35
Groverman-Walker, Judy, 51

Hall, Andy, 16
horticulture, 63, 65, 70, 94

Houweling, Theodora, 61
Howie, Millie, 51

Irwin, Susie Campbell, 13-14

Kaseburg, Manny, 51
Kunde, Arthur, 61-62, 64

Kunde, Bob, 64
Kunde, Catherine Mary Margaret
 Mageline, 61, 64
Kunde, Catie, 19, 37, 45, 53
Kunde, Fred, 64, 70
Kunde, Louis [brother], 65
Kunde, Louis and Marie, 59
Kunde, Marcie, 22
Kunde, Matthew, 17, 44, 53-54
Kunde, Theodora, 65

Lider, Lloyd, 67
Lose, David, 72
Luther Burbank Center, 44, 66

Margetts, Christine, 29
Matthew's Station, 33
McClelland, George, 4
McClelland, Lillian Elizabeth, 3-5, 7, 9-10
McClelland, Rebecca, 4
McClelland, Robert [brother], 4
McClelland, Robert, 3-6, 9, 12, 16
McPherson, Mary, 13
Mondavi, Robert, 20, 31
Morey, Dennison, 80

Neese, George, 72
Nether, Rainer, 16
Nunes, Tom, 25-26, 38

Olmo, Harold, 66, 67, 77, 79

Patrick, Joanie, 28
Pratt, Jim, 21, 78, 91-92

Reichardt, Jim, 53
Richard's Grove, 39, 46, 50
rootstocks and grafting, *passim*.
Russian River Valley Winegrowers,
 50-51, 55
sales and marketing, 30-33
Saralee's Vineyard, *passim*
Select Sonoma, 46-48
Shone Farm, 46, 49, 53, 95
Slow Food, 53
Sonoma Ag Art, 43-45
Sonoma County Fair, 15, 18-20
Sonoma County Grape Growers, 94
Sonoma County Harvest Fair, 18, 20-23,
 43-44
Sonoma County Vintners Foundation
 Board, 52-53
Sonoma County Wine Grape Commission,
 47, 51-52
Sonoma Grapevines, 17, 21, 23-24, 26-27,
 29, 45, 80-93

Sonoma Video, 24
Sonoma-Marin Fair, 14-15, 18

The Farmery, 30, 36, 44-47, 56, 92
Thomas, Richard K, 18, 94
Traverso, Bill, 77
Trenton Station, 35, 39

Vella's Cheese Factory, 62
vineyard designations, 33-34
vineyard management, 35-42
Vintage Nurseries, 29, 92
viticulture, 65-68

Westphal, Jim, 25
Wildwood Consulting, 76
Wildwood Vineyards, 59-60
Wilson, Bev, 14-15, 18
Wilson, Doug, 32
Wilson, Rebecca Jane Henning, 2
Wilson, Walter Ralston, 2
Wine Institute, 73, 75
wine labels, 72-74

Zellerbach Winery, 32
Zinfandel labeling, 77-79

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